AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF EX-PUPILS OF A SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR PUPILS WITH MODERATE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES ON THEIR SCHOOLING

by

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Education
College of Social Sciences
The University of Birmingham
January 2011

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Abstract

A phenomenological approach was used to elicit the perspectives of twenty ex-pupils of a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties on their education. Literature is reviewed on the history of special education, accessing the voice of young people especially those labelled as having learning difficulties, the perspectives of pupils and ex-pupils on their special schooling and Social Identity Theory. Semi-structured interview and other methods were used. Data were analysed using Nvivo software and manual methods. All pupils expressed affection for their special school and described a lack of adequate learning support in the mainstream schools. Otherwise their responses could be mostly categorised as one of three types. Some felt they didn't belong in the special school, they didn't choose to be there and they didn't easily admit having attended there. Another group identified strongly with the special school, they felt they had taken part in the decision for them to be there; they didn't want to attend mainstream school and engaged in denigrating them. They positioned themselves at the more able end of a hierarchy of special needs. A third group identified very strongly with the special school and saw it as a place of safety, a haven. Social Identity Theory is used as a framework to understand these responses. The work provides evidence of the unique and valuable contribution that young people labelled as having learning difficulties are able to make.

Dedication

To Ron and Kathleen Thomas

It is my good fortune that they are my Mum and Dad; without their lifelong love and support this would never have been completed, my love and thanks go to them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to Professor Ann Lewis who has supported me throughout the several years it has taken to complete this work. She above all has guided me on a long and life changing journey, always remaining positive, always encouraging, never disparaging; a wonderful teacher. Thank you.

The ex-pupils who very kindly agreed to give up their time for the purposes of this research also took me on a journey. They taught me lots and I am indebted to them and grateful for that and their central contribution to the work.

I would like to thank other teachers within the Education Department at The University of Birmingham, some of whom have now moved on, for their often inspirational teaching.

I also appreciate the work of administrative staff within Birmingham University who have always been courteous and resourceful in dealing with the many enquiries I have made of them.

I thank my children Edward, Jennie, Catherine and Emily for the many times this work took me from them and their families, and for the love and support they have always given me.

I thank Dad who, though he didn't realise it, made a comment which was the one reason I kept going when I had decided to give it up, and Allan Day, an excellent headteacher and tutor, who told me I could do it.

Finally I thank my partner Chris who has virtually only ever known me as a doctoral student. He has been there with me through some very low times, lifted me up and set me going again. I couldn't have completed this without his unfailing support, for which I will be forever grateful

ABBREVIATIONS

AHA	Area Health Authority
ASC	Autistic Spectrum Condition
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CDT	Craft and Design Technology
DES	Department for Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
EBD	Educational and Behavioural Difficulties
EdD	Doctor of Education
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
IT	Information Technology
LEA	Local Education Authority
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PE	Physical Education
RE	Religious Education
REF	Research Ethics Framework
SEBD	Social Educational and Behavioural Difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TSO	The Stationary Office
UN	United Nations

Terms

I am aware of the implications of labelling other people. For this reason I have endeavoured to refer to the participants in this study as 'ex-pupils of special school' rather than as people with learning difficulties, learning disabilities, learning impaired, intellectually impaired or as having special educational needs. Where these latter terms have been used in this work it is when referring to other people's work. Also, in some sections I have used what are now considered insulting terms only as they were used in historical documents and for reasons of accurate reporting.

Transcription Devices

R	Refers to the researcher who is always the author of this work
( )	The contents of the brackets is an explanation of what is being said or done by the person speaking
[ ]	The contents of the brackets is spoken by the person other than the one being quoted
... ...	Some of the conversation is omitted for the purposes of clarity/brevity
.....	A silence- the number of dots is proportionate to the length of silence

CONTENTS

		Page
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION		1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Developing an approach and design	2
1.3	Purpose	3
1.4	The research question	5
1.5	Conclusions and recommendations	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW		7
2.1	A history of special education	7
	Competing Perspectives	8
	Traditional histories or a complexity of interests and motives?	8
2.2	Accessing the views of young people, particularly those with learning difficulties	13
	Why access the views of young people: How has the awareness of this as an issue come about?	14
	Policy changes	14
2.3	Accessing the perspectives of pupils and ex-pupils on their experiences of 'special' education	17
	The retrospective view	17
	An appropriate curriculum and appropriate support	19
	The quality of teaching and teachers	20
	A special ethos	21

The dilemma 21

Other negative aspects 23

The restrictions of special provision 24

2.4 Social identity and group membership 25

2.4.1 Why Social Identity Theory 25

2.4.2 Social Identity Theory 26

2.4.3 The importance of group membership 27

2.4.4 Enhancing self-esteem 28

2.4.5 Uncertainty reduction 29

2.4.6 Complexities of the theory 29

2.4.7 Social identity of people labelled as having learning difficulties 32

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS 38

3.1 Developing a standpoint 38

3.2 Ethical issues 39

3.2.1 Is deciding what to research an ethical decision? 40

3.2.2 Paradigmatic positioning 42

What are paradigms? 42

Is choosing a paradigm an ethical decision? 43

A clarification of terms 46

3.2.3 The ethics of which methods to use 47

Respect 48

Respect for participants: Informed consent 48
Informing participants what may occur 49
Understanding and competence to consent 50
Voluntariness of consent 51
Beneficence 54
Maximising benefits 56
Labelling 57
Using or enabling people 57

3.2.4 Other ethical concerns 58
Role confusion 58
'Snowballing' 59
The integrity of the work 59

3.3 Methods for accessing the views of young people 61
3.3.1 Are the methods we use to access views effective? 65
Methodological problems of accessing the views of young children and young people with intellectual impairment 65
Problems with memory 65
Problems with the question type and mode of questioning 67
Suggestibility 67
Acquiescence and 'I don't know' answers 68
Problems with assumptions made by the interviewee 69
3.3.2 Solutions 70
Multi-method approaches 70
Suggestions and guidelines for eliciting views 72

Group interviews 73

Aiming for the uninterrupted narrative 73

Summary 76

3.4 Research design 76

3.4.1 Pilot studies 77

Pilot Study 1: An investigation of tools for measuring self-esteem 78

Pilot study 1: Results 80

Pilot Study 2: Using Cue Cards 83

The training sessions 85

Fifth session using Cue Cards 85

Method 85
Results 86

Other methods 87

Using camera 88
Ranking exercises 88

Refocusing 89

Pilot Study 3: Ex-pupils and semi-structured interviews 89

Pilot Study 4: Hierarchical Focussing 91

3.4.2 Developing and changing focus 94

The phenomenological approach 94
Ensuring a rigorous approach 97

3.4.3 Conclusions 103

3.5 The main study 104

The sample 105

Experience of mainstream schools 106

Methods 107

Making contact 107
Interviewing 108
Sorting exercise 114
Diamond Ranking 114
Drawings 115
Sharing with participants 115
Analyses 116
Reliability checks 118

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 122

4.1 Semi-structured interview: a reminder 122

4.2 Sorting exercise: a reminder and results 122

4.2.1 Results of sorting exercise 125

4.3 Diamond Ranking: a reminder and results 126

4.3.1 Results of diamond ranking exercise 126

4.4 Drawings/Word lists: a reminder and results 129

4.4.1 Results of drawing/word list exercise 131

4.5 Semi-structured interviews and other methods: findings 132

4.5.1 Mainstream schools 135

Mainstream is OK 135
Learning in mainstream school 136
Difficulties with work in mainstream school 136
Exams in mainstream school 138
Freedom in mainstream school 139
Behaviour in mainstream school 143
Summary of findings within

meta-theme: Mainstream schools 152
Discussion of findings within the meta-theme: Mainstream schools 154

4.5.2 Special school 156

The curriculum: Learning in the special school 156
The curriculum: Preference for practical curriculum in the special school 158
The curriculum: Extra-curricular activities/Visits in the special school 160
Support with learning in the special school 161
The nurturing nature of the special school 166
The staff in the special school 167
Fun at the special school 168
Scale 170
Facilities in the special school 173
Bad behaviour in the special school 175
Affection for the special school 180
Summary of findings within the meta-theme: Special school 183
Discussion of findings within the meta-theme: Special school 181

4.5.3 Learning difficulties and identity 191

Learning difficulties 191
A hierarchy of special needs 193
Wanting to attend mainstream school 199
Agency 203
A group who identified totally with the special school 205
Outliers 208

CHAPTER 5: PUTTING FINDINGS INTO CONTEXT AND CONCLUSIONS 211

5.1 Discussion 211

5.1.1 Placing the work in historical context 211

5.1.2 Accessing the views of young people labelled as having learning difficulties 214

5.1.3 The use of participant drawings as a method 216

5.1.4. A discussion of the findings in the context of similar research 217
An appropriate curriculum and appropriate support 217
The quality of teachers 218
A special ethos 218
The dilemma 218
Other negative aspects 219
The restrictions of special provision 220

5.1.5 Understanding the findings within a framework of Social Identity Theory 221

5.2 Implications of findings for policy and practice 227

5.2.1 Accessing the pupil's perspective 227

5.2.2 An appropriate environment for learning 228

5.2.3 Implications for method 230

5.3 Specific Limitations 231

5.4 Suggestions for future research 231

5.5 Dissemination 234

5.6 A return to the research question 235

Informing the decision makers 236

Are pupils diminished or empowered by their experience of special school? 237

Informing the teachers 237

Increasing inclusion in mainstream schools 238

Renegotiating the role of the special school 238

5.7 Concluding note 238

APPENDICES 241

Appendix 1: Record of supervision16.09.03 242

Appendix 2: Thomas, H. C. (in preparation) A history of special education 243

Appendix 3: Sociological and developmental reasons why accessing the voice of young people has become an issue 259

Appendix 4: Work grid 263

Appendix 5: Self-esteem: Proposal for a small study 267

Appendix 6: A comparison of self-esteem measures 275

Appendix 7: Request for consent: Letter to parents 282

Appendix 8: Notes on plans as of 16.09.03 283

Appendix 9: Record of Supervision 19.02.04 284

Appendix 10: Cue cards 285

Appendix 11: Response from school governors consenting to work 286

Appendix 12: Amended cue cards 287

Appendix 13: Detailed description of the first four training sessions, the amendments that were subsequently made to the cue cards and the way they were presented 289

Appendix 14: Details of results of the fifth training session using cue cards including transcripts 291

Appendix 15: Sample of pupil's diamond ranking 297

Appendix 16: Record of Supervision 30/11/04 298

Appendix 17: Detailed proposal for Pilot Study 3 299

Appendix 18: Questions for trialling Hierarchical focusing- Pilot Study 4 303

Appendix 19: Sample transcript of conversation 305

Appendix 20: Sample 'Highlights 'sheet corresponding to App. 19 318

Appendix 21: List of phrases for sorting and diamond ranking from transcript shown at App. 19 327

Appendix 22: Summary of work shared with participants 328

Appendix 23: The author's history of disability 333

Appendix 24: Sample of coding according to Hycner (1985)–Brian 339

Appendix 25: Comparison of author's and independent reader's codings- Darren 398

Appendix 26: Sorted items clustered into themes 404

Appendix 27: Drawings/word lists of Amy, Bella and Diane possibly indicating their relative immaturity 409

Appendix 28: Sullivan (1999) unpublished Masters dissertation findings re self-esteem of pupils in the special school that these participants attended 412

Appendix 29: Excerpt from Simon's transcript to show his ambivalence re which school he would like to attend 413

Appendix 30: Executive Summary 418

Appendix 31: Modules attended and related assignments submitted as part of the Birmingham University EdD programme 425

REFERENCES 426

BIBLIOGRAPHY 435

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Comments on some methods trialled to elicit pupils' talk	84
2	Change in number of words and number of items of information before without and with aid of cue cards.	86
3	Numbers of interviewees showing age and gender	106
4	Ex-pupils' experience of mainstream education	107
5	Methods of initial contact with ex-pupils	108
6	A comparison of author's and independent reader's code headings based on three randomly selected transcripts	120
7	Respondent consistency	124
8	Themes emerging from highlight sorting exercise indicating numbers of times mentioned	125
9	Summary of positive and negative themes emerging from highlight sorting exercise	125
10	Items prioritised as first by at least three ex-pupils collected into themes and showing with which educational setting the ex-pupil associated them	127
11	Items prioritised as first or second by at least three ex-pupils collected into themes and showing with which educational setting the ex-pupil associated them	128
12	Time lapse between initial interview and completion of drawing/word list exercise	130
13	Themes emerging from ex-pupils' drawings and word lists about a hypothetical special school and how many ex-pupils referred to items within each theme	131
14	Themes emerging from ex-pupils' drawings and word lists about a hypothetical mainstream school and how many ex-pupils referred to items within each theme	131
15	Themes emerging from ex-pupils' drawings and word lists about a hypothetical inclusive school and how many ex-pupils referred to items within each theme	132

16 Initial coding of interview data showing clustering of themes into meta-themes 134

17 Adjectives used by the ex-pupils to describe the special school they attended 180

18 Reasons given by ex-pupils for why they attended special school 192

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	The ‘special school experience’ domain as perceived by author before main study was begun	92

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The work reported here constitutes two thirds of the requirements for the Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme at Birmingham University. There is reference in this chapter to the six taught modules, their corresponding assignments and an extended preparatory work, which together constitute the remaining third of the required work.

In this chapter I outline the focus of this work, why it is of interest to me and how I justify its potential value. In the first section I explain the motivation for the work, describe the development of my standpoint and how the design of the work evolved. This section provides a brief description of how I intended the work to progress before starting the main fieldwork. In later sections, I expand on themes that are introduced here and describe in more detail how, when and why any changes to what was planned became necessary.

1.1 Background

Until very recently I was a teacher in a special school for pupils with 'moderate learning difficulties' (MLD). I had for many years found this a very satisfying role. However the debate around inclusion (Alderson and Goodey 1998, Daniels and Garner 1999, Cigman 2007, Norwich and Kelly 2005) led me to question both the role of that type of school and my role within it. This work adds to that debate. It reports work aimed at accessing what

sense ex-pupils of a special school made of their experiences. It contributes to policy makers' decisions by elucidating the debate around making mainstream schools more inclusive and whether there is a role for special schools, particularly those for pupils with 'moderate learning difficulties'

1.2 Developing an approach and design

My early thesis supervision scripts (see Appendix 1) show how my first thoughts on the direction of my work stemmed from my masters degree research on the self-esteem of pupils in a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. I proposed at that early stage to extend this earlier work by matching cohorts from the same school with a cohort of pupils from a mainstream secondary school and who had Statements of Special Educational Need (SEN), and comparing their self-esteem ratings. I piloted several self-esteem measures. I had little thought or awareness of which research standpoint I was assuming, although clearly (in retrospect) my proposed methods indicated a positivistic, quantitative approach. This proposal and earlier work had been motivated by my experiences of inducting year seven pupils into a special school and seeming to find that their confidence and self-esteem, after six years in mainstream education was low, but that they seemed to flourish after some time in the special school.

An early quote from my research diary reads:

> ‘As a result of completing module1, (Identity and Epistemology) and the associated assignment, I am moving away from the idea of measuring self-esteem. I wasn’t really aware of, or never considered, more interpretive research. ... ... does anyone ever consult current/past pupils re. their experiences of special/mainstream education?’
> (Quote from author’s own research diary, January ’03)

For a while, I am again reminded by my diary, I considered ‘…finding a useful quantitative measure, but also talking to pupils who have experienced mainstream and ‘special’ education.’ and in May ’03 I question how I will ‘…deal with the interview data…’, and make a note, ‘…methods of discourse analysis- grounded theory.’

I was encouraged to read life stories (Atkinson 1997, Armstrong 2003, Billington 2000, Gray 1999) and found them fascinating, and was then fortunate to be guided towards the work of Clark and Moss (2001) on listening to children. Reading these and exposure to other constructivist, participatory and critical standpoint research caused me to totally refocus my planned work. I came to recognise that, for me, what really mattered was what the people who had experienced special education thought of that experience. Rather than impose an external measure of self-esteem on them I wanted to see what would emerge from their talk about their experiences, what was important and significant for them. I came to respect these pupils and ex-pupils as sources of a knowledge that could not be accessed otherwise and hence I assumed a constructivist position as a researcher.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of my work is to inform those that make decisions about provision for pupils with ‘special needs’ of ex-pupils’ accounts of their experiences of special education.

However, I appreciate the inadequacy of this as a statement of purpose. I could have supplied them with the 'raw data', perhaps organised it in some way or I could have used the data to generate 'an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena' (Strauss and Corbin 1998 p.15). Strauss and Corbin (1998) carefully distinguish between these three, i.e. description, conceptual ordering and the generation of theory. If I was merely describing, then my aim would have been to elicit accounts from the ex-pupils that were as truly representative of their views as possible. However, interesting as these accounts are, the work becomes more informative when the data is organised according to … '… a selective and specified set of properties and their dimensions.' (Strauss and Corbin 1998 p.15). In this scenario data might be organised under headings such as 'pupils perceptions of why they went to special school', 'Relationships with peers in school', 'Relationships with peers outside school', etc. Strauss and Corbin call this, 'conceptual ordering'. The work could end at this point, but even more usefully these headings could be… '… placed within a larger unifying framework.' (Strauss and Corbin 1998 p.21) i.e. used to generate a theory of pupils' perceptions of experiencing 'special' education, which could then be used to… '…explain and predict events, thereby providing guides to action.' (Strauss and Corbin 1998 p.25). I believe this work will contribute to knowledge in each of these three ways.

There is a secondary purpose to the work, though 'outcome' would be a better description since it is a 'by-product' of the work. It is clear that I take a constructivist position but I was also concerned that the work was participatory and hopefully transformative/emancipatory, in that participants would find the experience empowering. However, as attractive as I find the emancipatory/transformative standpoint as described by Mertens and McClaughlin…

> '… researchers who work from this perspective explicitly acknowledge that issues of discrimination and oppression must be addressed…. …In the transformative/emancipatory paradigm, there… … is agreement as to the importance of an interactive relationship between the researcher and those with disabilities. However, there is also a critical examination of issues of power and control of the research process and the interpretation of the results from the viewpoint of people with disabilities.'
> (Mertens and McClaughlin 2004 p100)

… I found myself unable to meet the requirements of emancipatory research as described by Goodley (2000), Oliver (1997) who believe that disabled people can only empower themselves and to this end must control the research including the funding.

I cannot therefore describe my research as of that paradigm for though I always intended for there to be an interactive relationship between myself and the ex-pupils, I was not prepared to relinquish power and control of the research process. So the secondary purpose was that the ex-pupils would in some way benefit from participating in the work. I hope that they feel empowered by discovering that their opinion is valued and that they can contribute and advise on work of this nature.

1.4 The Research Question

The question is: How do people who recently experienced 'special education' perceive that experience? Is there something that can be generated from analysis of those accounts that can be useful in informing authorities that place, or do not place, pupils with statements of

special educational need in special schools and teachers who work within mainstream and special settings? Are pupils of special schools diminished or are they empowered by the experience? Can this information be used to renegotiate the role of the special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and/or inform increased inclusion in mainstream settings?

1.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

It was important that, despite my self-confessed prejudices in the field of special education, I remained open about the outcomes of this work. It is not the nature of a work of this kind, using a phenomenological approach to data analysis, to prove a hypothesis. I hope that my work will have been rigorous enough to provide an insight into the perspective that pupils who have experienced special education have of that experience and that this insight will prove useful in contributing to the knowledge that those in authority draw on when deciding about provision for pupils.

I also hope that the ex-pupil participants will feel empowered by the experience.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a review of some of the literature pertinent to this work. To provide context I summarise and refer readers to, a paper which reviews the literature around special education provision, its history and the enduring discussion around integration and inclusion. Secondly I review similar studies which aim to access the perspective of pupils and ex-pupils on their experiences of 'special' education. This is followed by an examination of literature in the area of accessing the views of young people and finally I review Social Identity Theory literature because it became apparent that this would enhance the understanding of some aspects of the findings.

2.1 A history of special education.

First I will outline some of the difficulties around writing a history of special education and of teasing out interests and motives for change. Due to limitations of space I am unable to develop this discussion here, but I refer readers to a paper (Thomas, in preparation see Appendix 2) in which I give an account of the development of special education within the context of mainstream education from approximately 1870, being the date of the commencement of educational provision for all children, until approximately 1990, being the time when the subjects of this work had entered special education.

Competing perspectives

The history of special education is one of complexity, of competing perspectives and of perspectives that are not able to compete (See Winzer 1993, Swain 2005 and Van Drenth, 2005 for accounts of the neglect of the perspectives of those who were subjected to the practices of special education). Sociological, psychological, medical, scientific and political perspectives each offer a different view as do politicians, various professionals, parents and pupils; though, as already stated, the perspectives of these latter two have proved difficult to access. A study of the history also reveals competing concerns including: economic efficiency, humanitarian care, control, access to education and human rights. The history is a minefield of dichotomies: traditional or effective (Armstrong, 2002, Armstrong, 2007, Lanear, 2007, Read and Walmsley, 2006), policy or practice (Read and Walmsley, 2006), optimistic or pessimistic (Dyson, 2001), social control/vested interest or liberal humanitarian (Cole, 1990).

Traditional histories or a complexity of interests and motives?

I have resisted the temptation to present a purely 'traditional' history of special education, for as others (Armstrong, 2002, 2007, Lanear, 2007, Read and Walmsley, 2006) have explained, these accounts, mainly of education acts and policy documents, do contribute one perspective, however they neglect to account for how and if policy became practice, and how, if it did become practice, it was often unevenly across geographic locations and at different times, (see contrasting accounts of early special education provision in London and Bedford in Read and Walmsley (2006), differences in expenditure between Birmingham and

Warrington in Hurt (1988) and of differences in assessment for entry to special schools in Myers and Brown (2005)). Traditional histories certainly neglect to represent the accounts of those people who were subjected to the practices of special education (Winzer 1993, Swain 2005), the accounts given by pupils and their families who had direct experience of special schooling (Myers and Brown 2005 p.73). In an attempt to see beyond the more facile historical accounts, Armstrong (2002) suggests 'alternative and additional' sources especially...

> '...the lives of people themselves as they are expressed through their own accounts.'
> (Armstrong, 2002 p.455)

These, she writes, should be used to test out the evidence from more traditional sources. However Read and Walmsley (2006) endeavoured to uncover 'the perspectives of those who were subject to the policies [of special education] – children and their families – drawing on documentary sources, oral history and biographies.'(p.456), but they were frustrated in their endeavour, they found that...

> '...the historical record is documented only in the professional voice, principally of teachers, doctors and institutional staff.'
> (Read & Walmsley, 2006 p.467)

Their **earliest** oral history came from Beryl, born in 1937 and interviewed in1991, (though Atkinson et al (1997) recorded oral histories of people born before this). Similarly Humphries and Gordon's (1992) book provides the 'first ever account' of the lives of blind, deaf and physically disabled people growing up in the first half of the 20th century. It seems that there is scant evidence of personal experience from any time before this.

It is tempting to think that histories of any topic describe a story of steady, smooth and planned improvement, from bad to good, or at least better, indeed Potts (1995 p.409) accuses Pritchard (1963) of just such a 'deceptively simple' portrayal, and Cole (1990) describes how Pritchard 'saw special education as having evolved primarily to help the handicapped child themselves.' Myers and Brown (2005) describe these as the 'happy narratives of progress', these are the oldest types of accounts and share 'a tendency to simple description'. They are 'the perspective of the policymaker and the administrator' and they treat 'uncritically or somewhat indulgently the advance of scientific and medical knowledge.' They 'effectively silence the voices of the people deemed mentally deficient or in need of special schooling.' (Myers and Brown 2005 p.101). Armstrong refutes the view of steady, planned, improvement:

> 'The development of special education is a social process and, contrary to some accounts, has not followed an orderly and progressive pathway or been planned according to rational principles.'
> (Armstrong 2002 p.445)

Whilst I agree with Armstrong that the steady, planned improvement is too simplistic a view, I am more dubious as to whether the **popular** view of historic development in this field, as she goes on to describe it, is one of benevolence, (Armstrong 2002, p.441), for stories of beadles and workhouses are familiar to us from an early age, and I believe this gives most lay people a very grim view of 17th, 18th and 19th century education in general. I understand her view that many historical accounts are of individuals, perhaps unquestioningly portrayed as benefactors, but it is undeniable that there is evidence of altruistic benevolence, for example Earl Shaftesbury's support of 'ragged' schools (Hansard, 1861) and their conception by John Pounds (Barnes-Downing et al 2007). The

position taken by Ford et al (1982) was to admit that there were 'significant individuals, whose philanthropy was obvious and unquestionable,', but that 'Little has ever been achieved by an oppressed, dependent or minority group or class without conflict and struggle.' (Ford et al, 1982 p.10). It is always difficult to identify motive, to tease out benevolence and altruism from more selfish motives or from budgetary pressures, and almost impossible when dealing with historical events. In a paper commenting on the views of some sociologists that 'special educational provision developed … …to serve the economic and commercial interests of society,' rather than for any more selfless reasons, Cole (1990 p.101) argues that… 'Contemporary documents more clearly demonstrate a common humanity and a desire to improve provision for the good of the handicapped child …' (Cole 1990 p.106). However the 1899 Report of the Royal Commission on the blind and deaf etc. reveals that they also had to consider economic expediency.

> 'It is better for the State to use the funds of elementary and technical education for a few years rather than have to support them through life in idleness, or to allow them to obtain their livelihood from private and public charity'
> (Report of the Royal Commission on the blind and deaf etc. 1899 v1 para. 240 p.xxxviii)

Clearly as Read concluded after analysis of London School Board documentation, motives and intentions are complex.

> '...for at least some of the women and men who made special schools their area of activity, optimism and a rhetoric of compassion coexisted with participation in the processes of classification that constructed the 'feeble-minded' child as 'other' and helped to justify the containment of that child in the separate space of the special school'
> (Read 2004 p.299)

Read concluded, as I do that, '... a range of motivations drove policy and practice and that humanitarian concern was a key element and not simply a cloak for other intentions.' (p.298).

Above I referred to Dyson's alternative to the 'unduly optimistic' or 'unduly pessimistic' views (Dyson 2001) of the history of special education. His paper not only brings this review up to date in its use of the term 'inclusive education', but it guides us as to what we can gain from a study of that history, and how we can use this to subject new resolutions that may be foist upon us to 'rigorous critical scrutiny' (Dyson 2001 p.28).

Dyson summarised the optimistic view of special education history as '...we know more, we can do more and have more humane attitudes than our counterparts in former times.' (p.24). Whereas the 'pessimistic view' emanates from the critical traditions of sociology which see the history as one of struggle between vested interests of powerful on the one hand and the oppressed and their struggle for inclusion on the other. Dyson argues that an alternative view is possible. He writes that there is a 'fundamental contradiction' within the education system, '...between an intention to treat all learners as essentially the same and an equal and opposite intention to treat them as different.' He invites us to see the history then in the context of this struggle. In other words we have to accept that we will never resolve the dilemma and should be wary of proposals that say they will do just that. But what we can usefully learn from an acceptance of this is the right sorts of questions to ask of any future proposals, we can be more aware of the pitfalls that might arise and of the probable transitory nature of those proposals. This does not mean though that proposals are of no use, inclusion has offered new opportunities and possibilities as well as creating some new problems. But what we are asked to do is to 'put ourselves in a position to manage the

complexities and contradictions with which we are faced in a more informed way.' (Dyson 2001 p.28).

I do not believe that the history of special education is one of pure altruism, selflessness and philanthropy, though examples of all three can be found, but neither do I believe it to be a story of self-seeking, vested interests, clinging to power and social control, though again I am sure examples of each can be found. Rather I agree with Cole (1989) that it is important that the past is viewed in an accurate and balanced manner. In reality the history does not nicely fit with either of the polarised explanations, more probably it is a complex mixture of each of these tempered by pragmatism, economic restraints and unexpected events. Rather than feel the need to ally ourselves with either of the extreme views it might be more useful to look for other models such as Dyson's described above.

2.2 Accessing the views of young people, particularly those with learning difficulties.

In reviewing the literature in this area I am concerned with why and how research which foregrounds the perspective of children and young people including those labelled as having learning difficulties has come to be valued in relatively recent times. I will review some of the literature which illustrates the interest in accessing the views of young people including those with learning disabilities and mostly written during the past quarter of a century. I will look at papers which indicate why and how this interest has developed, from a policy perspective.

Why access the views of young people: How has the awareness of this as an issue come about?

The reasons that accessing the views of young people has become an issue are difficult to disentangle. I have categorised them under sociological, developmental and policy headings, but am aware of the interrelatedness and interdependence of the categories. I will only develop the latter category here due to limitations of space. (See Appendix 3 for a discussion of the sociological and developmental reasons why accessing the views of young people have become issues.)

Policy changes

Children and young people have their rights to contribute, participate, be heard and have their views acted upon, codified by convention, law and code of practice.

The Gillick ruling (Gillick v West Norfolk AHA 1986) is worthy of particular mention in that it advocated the consultation of children about decisions which affect their lives but more so because it set the precedent that … '…doctor had a discretion to give contraceptive advice or treatment to a girl under 16 without her parents' knowledge or consent provided the girl had reached an age where she had **a sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable her to understand fully what was proposed,…' (**p.2 emphasis added). There is a linking here of an appreciation that the child has a valid point of view and implicit concomitant rights.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12:1), formulated in 1989 declared that:

> 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'
> (UN 2002) www.unicef.org accessed 22/10/05)

Britain ratified the convention in 1991 and legislated for increased opportunities for children to participate in decisions about themselves it the same year via The Children Act (DoH 1989). A 'torrent of initiatives' (Lewis 2004) followed to facilitate the hearing of children's views and acting upon them, including: *The Special Needs Code of Practice (DfE, 1994; DfES, 2001), Every Child Matters (TSO 2003), Working Together: Giving children and young people a say (DfES 2004),* and *Services for disabled children, (Audit Commission 2003).*

The 2006/7 case of twelve year old British girl, Misbah Rana, who fled to Pakistan to live with her father, was finally resolved because the girl's wishes were heard, considered and prioritised (New Scotsman 2010), and in April 2010 the judge took notice of the wishes of a six year old child when deciding which parent should have their custody. This is the youngest age at which 'a child has been found to have attained an age and degree of maturity at which it is appropriate to take account of its views' in a case governed by the Hague convention (W v W 2010).

So there is plenty of legislation and precedent which describes the rights of children to be heard, but what is debateable is whether having newly bestowed rights has meant any real change in the lived lives of young people. Having a right to genuine participation in decisions affecting them does not necessarily mean that all, or even many, young people genuinely participate in such decisions. What is 'genuine participation'? Despite the fact that pupils with statements of 'special educational need' have had their right to participate in an annual review of that statement encoded in law for several years now, research shows that:

> '...even in schools selected as more likely to have promising practices in SEN children's participation, there were inconsistencies in practices and many perceived barriers to eliciting pupils' views, consulting with them and negotiating over decisions affecting them.'
> (Norwich et al, 2006)

Rights could also be considered meaningless if the individual is not enabled to have the choice of whether they exercise those rights. Enabling would involve the young person developing recognition that they have agency, that they have genuine choice. This can neither be achieved easily nor quickly, but over years and with great difficulty for some young people. Even then we must question the value of the right to voice if adults do not listen and are not prepared to act upon what they hear, or if there is only tokenistic, but no genuine, choice.

Undoubtedly our understanding of childhood has changed, our understanding of cognitive development has changed (See Appendix 3 for evidence of these changes) and there have been policy changes, all of which point to the wisdom of accessing young people's views.

2.3 Accessing the perspectives of pupils and ex-pupils on their experiences of 'special' education.

The last twenty years have seen a gradual increase in attempts to elicit the perspectives of pupils labelled as having special educational needs on their education. The settings which have been investigated range from mainstream schools or support units within mainstream schools (Sheldon 1991, Tisdall and Dawson 1994, Jahnukainen 2001, Preece and Timmins 2004), to separate special day schools (Cheston 1994, Norwich 1997, Wise and Upton 1998, Allan and Brown 2001) and to special residential provision (Cooper 1993, Farrel and Polat 2003, Smith, McKay and Chakrabarti 2004, Hornby and Witte 2008). Some studies compare provision for pupils described as having special educational needs (SEN) in different settings (Wade and Moore 1993, Norwich and Kelly 2004), whereas others investigate the views of pupils who have transferred from a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) to mainstream schools, their views being elicited again ten years later (Kidd and Hornby 1993, Hornby and Kidd 2001). Other types of educational provision, such as the small residential facility within a community special school investigated by Hallet, Hallet and McAteer (2007) and the inclusion project whereby special schools formed liaisons with mainstream schools investigated by Fredrickson et al (2004) are also examples of research where the pupils' views were sought.

The retrospective view

All but five of the works referenced above sought the views of current pupils on their schooling. The five exceptions (Hornby and Kidd 2001, Hornby and Witte 2008, Farrell and

Polat 2003, Jahnukainen 2001, Sheldon 2001) sought a retrospective view. Whether participants are current pupils or ex-pupils partly depends on the purpose of the work. The effect of schooling on, for example, employment can only be assessed in a retrospective study. Hornby and Witte (2008) saw the significance of their retrospective work as lying in... '...the length of time between school attendance and the follow-up, which captured the graduates' views as young adults looking back on their time at the residential school, within the context of their entire school careers' (p106). The benefit of the retrospective study is not only that the participants have had time to reflect on their schooling but also to assess the impact of that schooling on their life since (Farrell and Polat 2003). These benefits need to be weighed against the fact that the experience is very recent when the perspectives of current pupils are accessed and therefore less likely to be distorted by time.

Lewis et al (2006) imply that they did not want the retrospective view:

> 'The 'voices' of young disabled people and their parents/carers were rarely heard in the literature on disability and education, and when they were they often focused on people who had left education and were considering their experiences retrospectively.'
> (Lewis et al 2006 p2).

Their report which aimed to 'identify the key concerns and priorities for disabled children and young people in Great Britain in relation to their experiences of education' (p2) was best served by participants who were current pupils.

A review of this literature generally reveals a positive view of the special provision experienced by the participants in the research, however this has to be weighed against some negative aspects which can present a dilemma, described by Norwich as the 'dilemma of difference' (Norwich and Kelly 2005).

> ‘There are positive and negative conceptions in our society about human differences and what we call differentiation in education. The negative perspective is that ‘difference’ reflects lower status, less value and perpetuating inequalities and unfair treatment. The positive perspective is that ‘difference’ reflects the recognition of individuality, individual needs and interests. It is this tension between these conceptions of difference which leads us to confront dilemmas of difference.’
> (Norwich and Kelly 2005 p38)

Although none of the work referenced above is precisely similar to the work reported in this study, i.e. its participants were ex-pupils of an MLD special school all in their twenties; some of the findings may resonate with this research.

An appropriate curriculum and appropriate support

Pupils perceive that they make progress with their learning in special provision, both in academic work, especially with overcoming literacy difficulties (Norwich 1997, Allan and Brown 2001) but also in social terms (Allan and Brown 2001). They describe the curriculum as being organised differently from mainstream (Sheldon 1991), more interesting than mainstream (Allan and Brown 2001) and more practical (Farrell and Polat 2003). It may be that this perceived progress is related to the two themes which emerge most frequently from these studies: the amount and quality of learning support which pupils were able to access in special provision compared with mainstream and the related theme of relative size/scale of mainstream classes and schools.

Norwich (1997) reports that the majority of pupils had little confidence that mainstream schools could provide similar support to that provided in special school classes, mainly due to the inadequacy of available teaching conditions in mainstream schools. Similarly Wise and Upton (1998) describe how special school pupils perceived the size of mainstream classes as contributing to their academic difficulties, one pupil commented that mainstream teachers: 'Always [have] something else to do never get hold of them.' (p7). Small class sizes were identified as a positive characteristic of special provision by participants in the work of Jahnukainen (2001), Farrell and Polat (2003) and Preece and Timmins (2004). Most pupils in Sheldon's work remarked on the large size of mainstream classes and schools (Sheldon 1991), it seems that not only do poor teacher pupil ratios mean that pupils cannot access enough teacher time but that there are also psychological demands on some pupils that result from the size of mainstream schools (Wise and Upton 1998).

The quality of teaching and teachers

A further theme emerging from these studies is the quality of teaching and teachers which pupils reported experiencing within special provision. Wise and Upton (1998) when researching the perceptions of pupils on their emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) special school concluded that disruption and disaffection can result from, '...Bad teaching involving inconsistency, unfairness, lack of control, aggressive authoritarian methods of discipline, lack of academic or personal support in meeting individual needs, impersonal relationships.' (p10) all of which the pupils associated with mainstream teaching. Whereas

in special settings they valued 'good' teachers (Norwich 1997) who had time to form relationships with pupils (Sheldon 1991,Cooper 1993, Wise and Upton 1998, Farrell and Polat 2003, Smith et al 2004), were fair with them (Wise and Upton 1998, Jahnukainen 2001) respected them, and not least had a sense of humour (Preece and Timmins 2004).

A special ethos

Pupils in Preece and Timmins' (2004) study of the perspectives of pupils in an inclusion centre within a large secondary mainstream school spoke of liking the ethos of the centre; it was quiet, friendly and safe. Other studies reveal this 'respite providing' role of special provision. The pupils in the residential EBD schools in Cooper's (1993) work described how they felt their time there gave them respite from family, neighbourhood peers and their former schools. Not only were they physically safe in the residential school but their presence there gave them time to rid themselves of an identity they had felt pressured to assume and time to take on a new, more positive, identity. For yet others special school was 'like a family' (Allan and Brown 2001 p204) or even became their substitute family (Farrell and Polat 2003, p284).

The dilemma

Norwich writes that despite the fact that pupils describe the benefits of attending special schools they also appreciate the 'devalued identity' associated with attending special provision (Norwich 1997) and that this puts the pupils in a dilemmatic position. Pupils in

the MLD special school in Norwich's (1997) study describe bullying and teasing from outsiders and in their later work (Norwich and Kelly 2004) they found that primary special school pupils reported significantly more bullying by mainstream pupils than did similar pupils in mainstream, and similarly, that primary and secondary special school pupils reported significantly more bullying from neighbours and peers outside school than did their mainstream peers. However the research is not conclusive as to whether the bullying is because of the pupils' placements in special schools or because of their perceived disability. Even though the pupils in these studies all had statements for special educational needs they were not 'matched cohorts', one from special school and one from mainstream school, as Norwich and Kelly describe, they aimed to identify fifty pupils in each of two age ranges, '... with half being drawn from mainstream, and half from the four relevant LEA special schools.' (p71), but they go on to say that, '... no attempt was made to match the pupils in the mainstream and special schools in terms of kind and degree of learning difficulties,... ... those in special school were expected to have more severe difficulties, which in fact proved to be the case.' (p71). It could be the relative severity of their difficulty was the variable which exposed the special school pupils to more bullying.

Pupils from the EBD class located within a mainstream school in Finland felt they experienced stereotypical expectations of their behaviour from other pupils and staff in the wider school but again it is not conclusive as to whether these expectations were due to their location in the EBD class or their manifested behaviour (Jahnukainen 2001). There is surprisingly little reference to the stigmatising effect of being placed in special provision in other studies, though Tisdall and Dawson (1994) do describe how some of the participants

in their study of a support facility for physically disabled and hearing impaired pupils situated within a mainstream comprehensive school spoke of the stigma of their disability; this of course is not the same proposition as being stigmatised by location in special educational provision.

Other negative aspects

As special provision is not to be found in every community, attendance at special school or even at a unit within a mainstream school will often mean that a pupil has to travel, sometimes considerable distances, away from their own neighbourhood. This can be socially isolating as described by respondents in Tisdall and Dawson's work, investigating pupils with physical disabilities attending a support facility within a large comprehensive school. The respondents thought that smaller units attached to their local schools would be a better way of meeting their needs and more than half of their respondents reported difficulties in forming friendships at home which they felt was '...because of the long distance they lived from the school.' (Tisdall and Dawson 1994 p181). Conversely some pupils find friends within their special provision which can be a relief from the isolation they have experienced due to their perceived disability within their own neighbourhoods. In Hallet, Hallet and McAteer's 2005 review of residential provision in special education in one local authority, '... the item cited as being of paramount importance to most [pupils] was "*being with friends".'* (Hallet et al 2007).

The restrictions of special provision

Some pupils describe the provision of the special unit as '...a bit restrictive...' (Tisdall and Dawson 1994 p181), and pupils in an EBD unit in Finland complained of the 'low level instruction' (Jahnukainen 2001) within the unit, though interestingly, neither of these studies included participants who were labelled as having learning disabilities and other studies, especially of such pupils seem to reflect the appropriateness of both content and methods of delivery of the curriculum in their special schools. The pupils in Allan and Brown's work (2001) which investigated eighteen special schools in two education authorities and included interviewing fourteen pupils from three special schools, all for pupils with learning difficulties, '... viewed the curriculum they experienced as broad and balanced, with a great deal of variety and, comparing it with mainstream, one group of pupils considered it to have more interest...' (p204). Whilst the pupils in Wise and Upton's study of two special schools for pupils with EBD did not comment on the curriculum within their special schools they did comment that the curriculum in their mainstream schools had been either 'irrelevant or too challenging'.

As indicated in the previous section of this literature review, there have been relatively few 'consumer' accounts of special education provision. What accounts there are come from a diverse array of provision, both in the pupils they provide for and in the way they provide for them. However they all describe a perspective of what it is like to find oneself categorised as 'different' and therefore should contribute to an understanding of the findings of this work.

2.4 Social identity and group membership

After detailed analysis of what the ex-pupils had communicated as their perspective, it seemed that some aspects of what they were saying could be better understood within a Social Identity Theory (SIT) framework. I will review here the literature on SIT and specifically I review the literature around the social identity of people labelled as having learning difficulties and the implications of the various findings for self-advocacy and self-advocacy groups.

2.4.1 Why Social Identity Theory?

I confine myself to the area of social identity theory, as opposed to individual identity theory, because it is about groups of people and because the purpose of this work is to discover and understand the effect it has on people when we put them into a particular group: the special school. This is not to deny the relevance, importance and possible explanations offered by individual identity theories, and indeed, whether to look to personal identity or social identity for explanations in this work has occupied much of my time. I am aware that self-esteem will be a central concept in any understanding of the ex-pupils' perspectives and that this could be explained with reference to individual self-esteem theories. I am comforted by finding that I am not alone in this difficult decision, as Hogg and Mullin point out:

> 'The problem arises that social identification is only one way in which a person who strives for positive self-esteem can achieve this goal, and it may therefore be important empirically to be

> able to distinguish between self-esteem associated with 'self' as a group member (i.e. social identity) and 'self' as a separate individual or 'not a group member' (i.e. personal identity).' (Hogg and Mullin 1999 p. 251)

However self-esteem is not the only motivation discussed within SIT, Hogg and Mullin (1999) suggest that 'social categorization' and uncertainty reduction are other 'possible motivational mechanisms' (p.251) both of which are pertinent to this study and neither of which can be understood by reference to individual identity theory alone. The participants in this work are/were in a very distinct, (if externally imposed), group, and one that could be described as low-status.

I therefore chose social identity theory as a framework to, at least in part, understand the perspectives of ex-pupils of special school elicited in this research.

2.4.2 Social Identity Theory

To understand the roots of social identity theory, an understanding of basic human motivations as described by Maslow (1943, 1954) is useful. He explained that after the basic drives for food and water are satiated the need for safety is the next priority, followed by the needs for belonginess, love and then for esteem derived from both self-respect and the respect of others (Maslow 1943, p.381). The need for self-actualization or 'doing what the individual is fitted for' comes next in the hierarchy (Maslow 1954 p.91), followed by the motivation to know and to understand.

2.4.3 The importance of group membership

There is a drive for humans to become group members:

> '...Friendships and group allegiance seem to arise spontaneously and readily, without needing evidence of material advantage or inferred similarity. Not only do relationships emerge quite naturally, but people invest a great deal of time and effort in fostering supportive relationships with others.'
> (Baumeister and Leary 1995 p 502)

Identifying with a group is a 'particularly effective way' of reducing the personal discomfort produced by being uncertain of whom one is in terms of 'beliefs, attitudes and feelings' (Hogg and Abrams 1988 p.3, Hogg and Mullin 1999 p.269). Group membership also serves to enhance the individual's self-esteem via positive comparison of one's own group with another group (Abrams and Hogg 1990 p.3).

However if both striving to increase one's self-esteem and group membership are so basic to humans, what happens when, like the subjects of this study, one finds oneself in a low-status group where it would seem the two motivations would be mutually exclusive? Though not uncontested, (see some discussion of criticisms of SIT below, but detailed description of these is beyond the scope of this work), Social Identity Theory does offer some explanations.

2.4.4 Enhancing self-esteem

Social identity theory proposes that we clarify our social identity through comparison between in-groups (groups to which we belong) and out-groups (groups to which we do not belong) and that this is motivated by the individual's desire for positive self-evaluation (Abrams and Hogg 1990 p.3)

If the individual cannot derive a positive social identity from their membership of a group, several options are available: social mobility, i.e. leaving the group, for the group to become more like the superior group, for the group to reinterpret the existing inferior characteristic as a positive quality, or for the group to find and develop another aspect which is valued by society (Tajfel 1974 p.82). Hogg and Abrams (1988) write that the option chosen will depend on: whether the individual perceives that the boundaries between the groups are permeable, if they do perceive them to be permeable they may opt for moving into a higher status group. If the individual perceives that the boundaries are impermeable then two pathways to preserving self-esteem are available. If the individual believes the boundaries are illegitimate, (as well as impermeable), then they will opt for raising the status of the group by undermining the status of the higher status group. If they perceive that the boundaries are legitimate (as well as impermeable), they will attempt to find another characteristic of the group and which compares favourably with higher status groups, hence enabling the members of the group to derive self-esteem.

2.4.5 Uncertainty reduction

Hogg and Mullin (1999) explained uncertainty reduction as people's... '...fundamental need to feel certain about their world and their place within it... it gives confidence about how to behave, and what to expect from the physical and social environment within which one finds oneself.' (Hogg and Mullin 1999 p.253). There is a link here with Maslow's motivation: the quest for knowledge and understanding. The function of this motivation could partly be understood because it was a learning of '...techniques for the achievement of basic safety in the world...' (Maslow 1954 p.94) though he did not feel this fully explained the drive for knowledge. But the reduction of anxiety and fear may have particular pertinence in this work about people who were special school pupils, and who anecdotally, lack certainty or confidence about where they fit in the world, why they are where they are, or even where they are.

2.4.6 Complexities of the theory

Boen and Vanbeselaere (2003) criticised social identity theory for the lack of experimental work to test its claims particularly how the variables may interact in a complex way. They looked at how stability i.e. 'the perceived chance that the status difference between the groups could be changed in the near future', permeability, i.e. 'the perceived possibility that individuals can move from one group to another', and individual ability, interacted to effect members of low-status groups (Boen and Vanbeselaere 2003 p.42). Though in conclusion they broadly agreed with the 'determinants of reactions to membership of a disadvantaged

group as proposed by... ... SIT...' (p.59), they did find some exceptions, but perhaps more importantly for this study they concluded that:

> '...we should abandon a strict interpretation of these theoretical models, and pay more attention to the dynamic and context-specific aspects involved in every inter-group situation...'
> (Boen and Vanbeselaere 2003 p.60)

Partly addressing Boen's and Vanbeselaere's criticisms of SIT, Reid and Hogg (2005) investigated how the two motivations: uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement interacted with each other to influence identification with a group. They found that:

> 'Members of *low status groups* identify more when they are uncertain, but only when they are prototypical of them; when they are not prototypical, uncertainty suppresses identification to produce a preference for high-status groups.'
> (Reid and Hogg 2005 p.815)

Prototypicality is a central concept of social identity theory and refers to how much the individual exemplifies what in-group members share and what they do not share with the out-group (Oakes et al 1999 p.60). Prototypes are not average or typical in-group members; 'they are ideal, often hypothetical, in-group members' (Hogg et al 2004 p.254). If they feel they are prototypical of the group, uncertainty increases a sense of belonging and if they feel they are not prototypical, uncertainty decreases the sense of belonging and they will prefer the higher status group.

To put these findings in the context of this work: if a pupil felt they were close to the 'special school prototype' and were uncertain i.e. had little understanding of their place in the social world, then they would have a greater sense of belonging to the group. Conversely

if they felt they were not close to the 'special school prototype' and had little understanding of their place in the social world they would have less sense of belonging.

Reid and Hogg's findings also provided an explanation for... '...why low-status groups often choose not to challenge the status quo...' (2005 p.816) ...although they may improve their status their uncertainty may increase. If we look at this in terms of Maslow's motivations then uncertainty reduction would have to be seen in terms of either the safety motivation or the need for beloningness if it takes precedence for being satisfied over self-esteem, and not in terms of the drive for knowledge and understanding, since this does not take precedence over the drive for self-esteem.

In analysing this work within a SIT framework I intend to follow the guidance offered by Boen and Vanbaselaere (2003) to be mindful of the context of the study (see above quote). When the low status group is a group of people labelled as having 'learning difficulties' then other factors may have to be considered. How permeable are the boundaries between the special school group and the mainstream group, either as perceived by the pupils of the special school or by others? How aware are they of their low status, either collectively or individually? To what extent are they aware of choices available to them? Do they identify as having 'learning difficulties' and if they do how salient is this identity? The answers to these questions would seem to add a further dimension to understanding the responses of the ex-pupils to attending special school and therefore I review the literature in the area of social identity of people labelled as having learning difficulties below.

2.4.7 Social identity of people labelled as having learning difficulties

I am aware that the label, 'learning difficulties' is not synonymous with the label, 'special school pupils', for not all people labelled as having learning difficulties attend or have attended special school, however most ex-pupils of special school will have been labelled as having learning difficulties.

A review of the literature around how people labelled as having learning difficulties respond to that identity should address the questions raised at the end of the last section and thus increase our understanding of how ex-pupils of special school perceive their schooling.

Some literature seems to suggest that people labelled as having learning difficulties or learning disabilities, on the whole, neither understand nor identify with that label (Davies and Jenkins 1997; Todd and Shearn 1997; Finlay and Lyons 1998; Beart 2005). Of the sixty young adults who were labelled as having learning difficulties and who took part in Davies' and Jenkins' study, the vast majority... '...did not understand the various and associated meanings used to refer to people with learning difficulties' (Davies and Jenkins 1997). Finlay and Lyons (1998) found that two thirds of the twenty-eight users of services for people with learning difficulties who were participants in their study, admitted the label 'learning difficulties' when directly asked... but the label was not used spontaneously in self-descriptions' (p.37).

What is the reason for this lack of identity with the 'learning difficulties/disabilities' label?

Beart (2005) explains the lack of salience of the label is due to:

> '(a) people with learning disabilities not having access to the meanings of and discussion about 'learning disabilities' as a categorization and (b) the emotional impact of this label. (Beart 2005 p.129)

Parents and carers tend to protect children and adults in their care from the low-status labels and therefore learning difficulties are rarely discussed in front of them. Todd and Shearn (1997) write of this 'lack of congruity' between an individual's self identity and their attributed learning disabled identity (p.362), and explain that it is because parents, carers and professionals for various reasons protect adults with learning difficulties from their identity as learning disabled and because of this many people with learning disabilities may be 'invisible to themselves' (p.363).

However if people do not realize that they are categorised/labelled as having learning difficulties, do not understand the label and do not perceive they are in a low status group and indeed are 'invisible to themselves' then it is unlikely that social identity theory can be useful as a framework to understand their responses because the theory rests on such realizations and perceptions. Furthermore efforts to raise the status of people labelled as having learning difficulties will be frustrated because self-advocacy and self-advocacy groups are surely predicated on the same realizations and perceptions.

Finlay and Lyons raised the issue of what the implication of their findings would be for self-advocacy groups and suggested that their findings may explain...

> '...some of the difficulties that self-advocacy groups have encountered in gaining momentum, namely that people with learning difficulties, for a variety of reasons, may not spontaneously identify with this broad group, a condition which is necessary for collective action.'
> (Finlay and Lyons 1998 p.49)

However Davies and Jenkins (1997) went on to say that though their participants did not understand the label and did not think it applied to them, all of them... '...were profoundly affected by experiences consequent upon their being categorised as having learning difficulties.' (p.96); the way they lived their lives showed that they assumed the category and this together with the consequent power relations contributed to their self-identity.

Rapley et al (1998) contested the idea that people with learning difficulties neither knew that they were categorised as having learning difficulties nor understood the term and they contested the work of Todd and Shearn (1997) in particular. They felt that Todd and Shearn's, and their own data, in fact contained evidence that the interviewees both accepted and rejected the 'learning difficulties' label according to the situation in which they found themselves and that they understood other's prejudiced views of the category, all of which implies that they both understood the label and that others had used it to describe them.

Though it does seem that there is some 'lived' understanding of the identity, this situation still presents a dilemma. The dilemma is that injustice is redressed via political activity, political activity requires collective action and collective action requires that individuals identify similarly with the injustice. If one does not identify or understand that identity then

the status-quo will remain and I remain convinced that others cannot empower, they can only facilitate empowerment.

Although Harris (1995) recommended 'softening boundaries' between dominant and low status groups as a move towards inclusion, e.g. by using the 'fuzzy' less definitive term 'leaning difficulties' rather than using the rigid IQ criterion, he also recognised that initially the low-status group's profile and value needed increasing and that this is achieved via 'collective strategies' reliant on a strong and distinct group identity. He understood the irony of this but pointed out that this strategy had been used successfully by black movement and feminist groups (p.349). As an example of this Rose and Kiger (1995) gave a very interesting account of how people in the deaf community in the USA changed their group identity from stigmatised to valued. They too noted that...

> '... an irony emerges. To bolster group members' self image, the group must exaggerate its members' distinctiveness and value it. ... ... As a minority group acquires `voice', it develops ethnocentrism to a heightened form as well. As the members of a minority group develop more positive self images, their perceptions of social justice change. Their sense of injustice leads to an unwillingness to stand for discrimination.'
> (Rose and Kiger 1995 p. 524)

It seems that justice may only be achieved via consciousness raising which, among people with learning difficulties may be even more fraught with difficulty than with people who are deaf, however, the distinct identity is an essential precursor to political action and ultimate justice. To paraphrase and adapt to this work Rose and Kiger's argument:

> ‘If [those labelled as learning disabled] do not insist on their distinctiveness, then it will be virtually impossible to have [learning disabled] persons identify with the [learning disabled community] and oppose discrimination.
> (paraphrased from Rose and Kiger 1995 p. 524)

So what are the solutions to this dilemma? Davies and Jenkins do **not** suggest that...

> ‘... people should be ‘told’, [that they have learning difficulties]’
> (Davies and Jenkins 1997 p. 108)

However they point out that ‘inadequate explanations’ only serve to disempower those they seek to protect. Finlay and Lyons also warn against... ‘...staff or supporters encouraging people to confront this issue, it is not up to the out-group to impose this definition on group-members.’ (1998 p.49) but they hope that... ‘... group identification and consciousness may occur more readily through contact with influential in-group members who explicitly identify with the group and use the concept to interpret situations,...’. My position is that telling people that some would categorise them as having learning difficulties and raising their awareness of the implications of this categorisation is not the same as telling them that they have learning difficulties or ‘imposing’ such a definition on them. Whilst I believe that it is the very fact of the ‘fuzzy’ definition of the learning difficulties group and a realization that we all have learning difficulties that will ultimately enhance the possibilities of inclusion, I recognise, like Rose and Kiger (1995) that initially the group needs a distinct, discrete, identity to access justice.

As Beart suggests perhaps there is more to identifying with a group for people with learning disabilities than understanding the label. She found that group members felt they belonged to the self-advocacy group but struggled to explain the term ‘learning disabilities’ and

anyway didn't feel it was salient for them. However once they had joined the group, for whatever reason, they described how they ultimately improved their self-concept and became aware of political action (Beart 2005 p.129).

The solution to the dilemma seems to be to provide an environment in which people labelled as having learning difficulties can share experiences, access facilitators and educate each other and have the choice of collective action. Harris (1995) suggested... '... an alliance between disabled and non-disabled people which may also soften the boundaries between groups.' (p.350); these solutions are already in place via 'People First' type groups which are... '...run and controlled by people with learning difficulties' and which aim to... '...make sure that people with learning difficulties know about their rights, can get their rights and have the same rights as everybody else' (People First Central England).

So what are the implications of these findings for this work about pupils in special schools? It will be necessary to know whether the ex-pupils in this study understood that they were in a special school, why they were there, what their understanding of special school was and how salient the learning difficulties category was to them. This knowledge will then inform whether an attempt should be made to understand their responses within a framework of social identity theory.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS

I will first describe how my research standpoint evolved. I will then describe the ethical issues which had to be addressed. A section on problems and solutions around accessing views is followed by a brief description of the research design. I will then describe the pilot studies I carried out and outline my developing and changing ideas around the more precise focus of my research. In the final section I will describe in detail the sample, the methods and the methods of analyses.

3.1 Developing a standpoint

What if anything is the role of the non-disabled disability researcher to be? As a special school teacher I am drawn to the idea of redressing imbalances in society and the idea that this can be achieved through the empowerment of those whose voices may not otherwise be heard. I do not believe that individuals can be empowered, that is, I do believe that empowerment is not something that can be done to individuals; rather, it is something that individuals must do for themselves. I agree with some in the disabled lobby that I, a non-disabled researcher, am not able to empower them, but I do not agree with those of them who would say that I have no right to research disability. I have written in more detail elsewhere about my role as a non-disabled researcher researching disability (Sullivan 2006).

I see my role as a facilitator of empowerment, most particularly of the intellectually impaired. However, I find myself in the difficult position of not being willing to relinquish control of my work to the disabled in the way that perhaps a dedicated emancipatory researcher should do. At one stage in the development of my work I planned to found a group of adults with moderate learning difficulties and was willing to put myself at their disposal to facilitate participatory research of their choosing. I formed a small group of such individuals and held a few meetings which were initially to be focusing on talking about their experiences of special schooling. I found the meetings enjoyable and fascinating in many ways, but realised that for several reasons, not least pragmatic ones, I could not continue. Continuing would require a major time commitment, possibly over years, which I was neither prepared nor able to give. I realised that for ethical reasons I could not set up a group for this purpose and then leave the group when I had taken what I needed from it. I also recognised that I had not worked in this way before and without training or even working alongside someone doing similar work, I might not be aware of all the implications. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, I had to admit that I would find it extremely difficult to not be in control and submit to the direction of the group. For all of the above reasons, whilst I have much empathy with them, I cannot claim to truly align myself, as a researcher, with the emancipatory/transformative approaches.

3.2 Ethical issues

I will discuss three areas about which the decisions that have to be made may have ethical implications: deciding what to research, choosing which paradigm in which to work and choosing which methods to use. In this latter section I will address the matters usually raised

by guidelines for ethical research and codes of ethics under the headings of Respect, Beneficence and Justice and describe how they applied to this work. I will also add some other ethical concerns which are not covered by these headings. Finally I will address the ethical aspect of the quality of the research and competence of the researcher.

3.2.1 Is deciding what to research an ethical decision?

Can research be justified as an end in itself or does it have to be 'useful'? There seem to be two problems with addressing this question. First, we would need to decide whether we are obliged as members of society to work to 'provide' knowledge that is useful to society. Second, we would need to decide what we mean by useful. There is discussion around whether research is ever value-free and whether knowledge can ever be separated from its utilization (Howe and Moses 1999, Christians 2000, Ortega 2005). These are debates which, due to wordage constraints I cannot describe or extend here except to raise the possibility that social science research and especially education research may occupy a different position from other areas in that they are essentially about people and social relationships and I agree with Howe and Moses comment (which is particularly relevant to my work), that...

> 'Educational research is always *advocacy* research inasmuch as it unavoidably advances some moral-political perspective. This is especially important for educational researchers to bear in mind because educational research so often deals with vulnerable student populations, and research results often have a direct impact on students' schooling experiences and educational opportunities. ... ...
> Howe and Moses (1999 p.56)

Howe and Moses (1999) said that... ‘to be truly ethical, educational researchers must be prepared to defend what their research is for.’ (p.56), and later Ortega wrote:

> ‘...it is not the methods or the epistemologies that justify the legitimacy and quality of human research, but the moral-political purposes that guide sustained research efforts.
> (Ortega, L. 2005 p.438)

From further reading of her paper it is clear that Ortega is not, as it appears from this quote, saying that the method and epistemological decisions do not contribute to the quality of the work, but that it is the moral-political purpose of the work that is prime.

The doctoral student is in a strange position in that the doing of the research project is part of the learning of ‘how to do research’, and the making of decisions, rather like Eric Morecambe’s piano notes, are ‘all there, but not necessarily in the right order’. Although I did not deliberately set out to look for a research topic that had moral and political purpose, I knew from an early stage that I wanted to work in the area of whether pupils attending special schools would benefit from inclusion in mainstream settings. I have always felt that this is an ethically defensible project. As a society we would surely hope to develop the full potential of each individual both to benefit the individual and society; part of achieving that aim involves being better informed about in which educational location that is best achieved. If school experience affects such significant outcomes as our self-esteem, how we perceive ourselves and others, how we relate to one another and our life chances, then it is surely a moral and political matter and therefore worthy of research.

However I came more slowly to understanding and adopting a paradigmatic position and to discussions around whether this too is an ethical decision.

3.2.2 Paradigmatic positioning

What are paradigms?

Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe paradigms as ‘a basic set of beliefs... ... they cannot be proven or disproven, but they represent the most fundamental positions we are willing to take.’ (p.80). A paradigm has its own explanation for what the nature of reality is, i.e. its distinctive ontology, and its own understanding of how we come to know, i.e. its distinctive epistemology. At a simple level the two paradigms that most clearly demonstrate contrasting positions are positivism and constructivism, though there are variants of each and indeed other paradigmatic positions.

Positivists believe that reality is independent of and external to the observer. The observer comes to know by detached observation. The constructivist position is that reality is socially constructed and the process of construction is how we come to know. Because of these differences they are bound to have specific methodologies, in the positivist case this will be about isolating and controlling variables and in the constructivist case about negotiating, analysing and constructing a consensus (Guba and Lincoln 1989).

Is choosing paradigms an ethical decision?

Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe how ethical issues became 'much more troublesome' when the positivistic paradigm became the mode of enquiry not only for inquiry into natural and material sciences but also for 'conducting social and behavioural inquiry' (pp117/8). As well as the four ethical areas which typically codes of practice and guidelines focus on, i.e. guarding subjects from harm, guarding them from deception, obtaining fully informed consent and guarding subjects' privacy, (all of which are referred to below), Guba and Lincoln describe some 'broader issues' which are problematic with the positivist position (p.123). Of those and relevant in this section on ethics are, the political nature of science and the supposed neutrality of the scientific method.

Positivist inquiry is political in that it is the researcher who sets the agenda, decides what will be inquired into, who the subjects will be and what questions will be asked. This puts them in a powerful position relative to the subjects of the research and has the effect of preserving that imbalance of power or of maintaining the status quo...

> 'Reflecting on past experience, disinterested research under presumed conditions of value freedom is increasingly seen as de facto reinscribing the agenda in its own terms.'
> (Christians 2000 p.142)

Because constructivist research is essentially about negotiation and co-creation it has the potential to provide a forum for change and redistribution of power.

Objectivity and neutrality are central to the positivist scientific method, but Christians (2000) describes this as a 'discredited worldview' (p.141). The overriding purpose of the positivist researcher is to discover the truth, sometimes this has meant that deception of subjects has been seen as necessary and in exceptional circumstances this continues today.

The constructivist view would be that the researcher inevitably brings their own value system, prejudices and biases to their work and therefore can be neither objective nor neutral and indeed it would not be their aim to be so. Because the constructivist researcher's aim is to understand the sense people make of, or the meanings people attach to their world, then the researcher of necessity has to interact, often quite closely, with participants in the research process, in fact it is the job of the researcher to negotiate and co-construct those meanings (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.21), therefore objectivity is meaningless within this paradigm.

> 'It [the methodology] must seek out and listen carefully to "voices"" embedded in their social context to gain a true understanding of what people are saying and why they do what they do. And dialogue itself has consequences: Beliefs, culture norms, and the like are not just there, waiting to be uncovered, but are negotiated and "constructed" via the interactions among researchers and those they study.'
> (Howe and Moses 1999 p.32)

The question here is whether one of these paradigms is intrinsically more ethical than the other. Lincoln and Guba (2000) write that the distinctive 'values or more correctly axiology' of different paradigms should be highlighted and considered when choosing a framework in which to work, and they describe the 'embedded' nature of ethics within some paradigms as opposed to their externality in others. Christians (2000) describes how 'Vigorous concern for research ethics during the 1980s and 1990s... ... the development of ethics codes and IRB [Institutional Review Bodies] apparatus are credited... '...with curbing outrageous abuses.'

But he explains how other problems, e.g. ‘fraud, plagiarism, and misrepresentation continue on a lesser scale... ...and controversies... ... over the application of ethical guidelines....’, and the impossibility of full supervision continue (p.141). He believes that whatever efforts are made to make ‘positivistic’ research ‘responsible’ they will always be frustrated because the standpoint which insists on ‘neutrality’ is incompatible with ‘social enquiry’. He contrasts this ... ‘ ...conventional view, with its extrinsic ethics...’ with standpoints, where research actively involves with participants and respects their ‘self-understanding’ (p.149) and where they are enabled ‘to come to terms with their everyday experiences themselves’ (p.145).

Quite apart from ethical considerations, I cannot envisage how working within a positivistic framework to address my particular research question could provide the depth or richness of response and therefore understandings that the constructivist approach offers. More importantly in this section on ethics, I feel that the constructivist approach acknowledges the wisdom of the respondent and offers the chance of a relationship which is more respectful of them. Furthermore, if, through my work, I respond to Howe and Moses (1999 p.38) call for research to militate against oppression, I will need to be concerned with redressing power imbalances, then again the constructivist position offers more opportunity. For these reasons choosing to work within a constructivist framework was, for me, an ethical decision.

I am aware that there is debate around whether paradigms are mutually exclusive as frameworks for research and that some (Ortega 2005) seem to espouse ‘epistemological diversity’. If the mixing of paradigms is a possibility then there would be implications for the issue of ethics. I have written elsewhere (Sullivan 2006) of my view on paradigm

mixing, though it has not changed substantially it has evolved since then and I summarise my current stance here.

In answering the question of whether paradigms are commensurable Lincoln and Guba (2000) give 'a cautious *yes*' (p.174).

> 'This is especially so if the models (paradigms) share axiomatic elements that are similar, or that resonate strongly between them. So, for instance, positivism and postpositivism are clearly commensurable.... ...Commensurability is an issue only when researchers want to 'pick and choose' among the axioms of positivist and interpretivist models, because the axioms are contradictory and mutually exclusive.'
> (Lincoln and Guba 2000 p.174)

A clarification of terms

Before answering I need to explain my understanding and use of the terms 'methodology' and 'method' for they are sometimes used interchangeably and this can lead to confusion.

To me a methodology is inseparable from its paradigm; it is part of the definition of the paradigm, e.g. the scientific methodology is about the control of variables, the constructivist paradigm is about negotiation and consensus. Whereas methods are the tools of the research, and, though some are used more commonly in one paradigm than another, they can be used

across paradigms without threatening the integrity of the work. For example an interview or a questionnaire could be used legitimately within both paradigms.

My response to a proposal of mixing paradigms would be even more cautious than that of Lincoln and Guba. I can understand mixed methods, even across paradigms which are axiomatically different, but not mixed methodologies. I can also understand that within axiomatically similar paradigms some methods and also outcomes may be similar, for example some participatory research may have emancipatory outcomes, but for me it is the ontology, epistemology and methodology which are the defining essence of each paradigm and therefore 'mixing of paradigms' is a non sequitur.

3.2.3 The ethics of which methods to use

Before commencing this work and during its course I have consulted and considered various codes and guidelines including: The British Educational Research Association's (BERA) 'Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004), The University of Birmingham Code of Practice for Research 2009-10, the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) 'Research Ethics Framework' (REF) and The Belmont Report (1979). I refer to these below. However as Homan (1991) writes, much of the debate around ethics is about infringement of these codes and guidelines and... '...the minor part of the debate in recent years has been about whether the rules effectively safeguard the values and rights

they are intended to protect.' (p.2) and included below is description of times when issues of safeguarding and rights which were not addressed by codes and guidelines arose.

All ethical considerations in this work are about respect for participants or the integrity of the work.

Respect

Respect is one of the three main principles of ethical research as described by The Belmont Report (1979) which is a statement of basic ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical problems that surround the conduct of research with human subjects. In it, respect is described as: 'the requirement to acknowledge autonomy and the requirement to protect those with diminished autonomy.... ... To respect autonomy is to give weight to autonomous persons' considered opinions...' (The Belmont Report 1979, part B:1). I consider for reasons explained below that the ex-pupils who participated in this research were relatively autonomous and that the fact that they were the subjects of this work meant that their opinions were valued and had the potential to be acted upon.

Respect for participants: Informed consent

The concept of informed consent is central to the codes and guidelines mentioned above and to discussions of ethical considerations elsewhere (Sieber 1992, Sales and Folkman 2000, Smith 2000, Stalker 2004, Mertens and McLaughlin 2004). One cannot be said to have respect for a person's autonomy if information on which they are expected to make decisions is withheld. But as David et al warn consent must be ongoing and not 'one off'

(David et al 2001), they also point out the information given needs to match the competence of the individual.

Homan (2001) describes four elements of informed consent: that participants should be informed of everything that will and may occur, that they should be able to understand this, that they should be competent to give consent and that consent should be voluntary. I will discuss each of these in the context of this work.

Informing participants of what would and may occur.

During the initial contact with potential participants I briefly outlined the nature of the work I was doing, i.e. I explained that I was hoping to talk to ex-pupils of the school about what it was like to go to special school and that I was doing it as part of my university studies. During the initial interview I explained in detail the nature of the work in simple but full and accurate terms. I explained that I wanted them to talk as freely as possible about going to special school and that what I would like most of all would be for them to talk without me interrupting for as long as they wished about that experience. I added that I knew this may be difficult so I may help them with a question from time to time. I explained that I wanted to audio record what they said and that I would then type this up and that they would have the chance to check that what I had typed was what they had actually said and meant and that they could have any part removed without my questioning them as to why. I described how they would be asked to return to check the typing and add anything else, that at that second session I would ask them to sort some words they had used as to whether they were about mainstream or special school, to put in order some things they had said depending

how important they were to them and that I would ask them to either draw a picture or list some words about the special school they went to, a mainstream school and the school that everyone could go to and be happy. In most interviews I recorded this explanation and transcribed it, on occasions I made this explanation before commencing recording. I went on to explain that what I found out from them all would be written and made into a book to be kept at the university and that this could be used to help people who make decisions about whether there should be special schools or not to make those decisions. I also told them that the work would help me to get a qualification. Lastly I explained that when the work was finished all participants would be invited by me to meet for a celebration and that I would give them a copy of what I had found out.

Understanding and competence to consent

The Economic and Social Research Council' (ESRC) would consider the participants in this work as at 'more than minimal risk' because it involves a vulnerable group, i.e. young people with a learning disability or cognitive impairment. Though the respondents in this work may be considered to be vulnerable young people, they were included in the project precisely because they represented a group of people who may well have attended mainstream schooling- in fact most of them had. They were, in my judgement, aided by my prior acquaintance with them, intellectually fully capable of understanding the work as I had explained it.

Voluntariness of consent

I was aware of the dangers of 'insider research' (Homan 2001), i.e. research where the researcher is already known to the subjects and, as in the case of teachers doing research with pupils, is in a position of authority over them. Sales and Lavin (2000) write of role conflict when a teacher is the researcher and the potential for 'abuses of power' (p.111). Homan writes of 'The myth of voluntariness'

> '... while students are formally free to withhold consent, the psychological and emotional reality is that freedom is compromised.'
> (Homan 2001 p.336)

I do not believe this was a problem in this work. It is true that I had been a teacher in the school whilst they had attended and I had taught most of them.

Homan (1991) also warns that in such cases

> 'It may be that an attitude of trust or loyalty or a climate of reciprocal favour is made to apply in the giving of consent. Pupils may overcome apprehension or misgivings only because in other situations the teacher has secured their trust'
> (Homan 1991 p341)

I feel that the pupils' trust in me was a positive rather than negative aspect of the work. Because they had trust in me they believed what I said and therefore if I told them they could refuse or withdraw without issue then that would be the case.

In an attempt to facilitate their refusal to consent I always attempted to make contact via a third party, a peer, a sibling or a parent. As described in section 3.5, this is how contact with fourteen of the potential twenty-two ex-pupils was made. However, I 'ran into' six potential participants and raised the possibility of them contributing to the research. Rather

unethically, I realised in retrospect, I approached two potential participants in their public place of work and though both agreed to take part at the time, one failed to attend the interview and the other declined to attend the second interview. Whilst I think it possible that those pupils who agreed to take part did so because they knew me, they invariably gave the impression that they were keen to participate, without exception they seemed to derive great pleasure from the experience and usually seemed genuinely interested in the work. Several did refuse consent to take part in the interviews and two participants declined the invitation to attend the follow-up interview; I offer this as evidence that the participants understood the voluntary nature of their consent.

Making contact with potential participants was a very difficult aspect of the work (see section 3.5). Although I had originally wanted to recruit only ex-pupils between twenty and twenty three years of age a shortage of contactable subjects after two years of searching, lead to the eventual inclusion of some outside this range. Though I could have gained direct access to ex-pupil contact details via school records I decided that this was an unethical, if not illegal, use of school data. It was an ongoing struggle and frustration to accept refusals and difficult to gauge how much persuasion was ethically acceptable.

I stressed the fact that participants were free to withdraw at any time, to have anything they said removed from the transcript and advised them that they would not be questioned as to why they wanted it removed. One respondent exercised this latter right by removing one sentence. I was aware, from my prior knowledge of the participants, that many of them had varying difficulties with reading, so in follow up sessions I sat alongside them and read the highlights, that is the salient parts or the parts that I envisaged would be meaningful and

included in the analysis, to them, (I felt that reading through the whole transcript would be too onerous for the participants), and gave them the option to withdraw any part, no one exercised this option. I reminded them that they were free to withdraw at any time. I continued to remind them of this option until closure.

Homan has reservations about how informed consent is sometimes gained:

> '...the subject's signature on a piece of paper may be held to indemnify the researcher. And once subjects know that research is being conducted and participation is voluntary, the investigator may deploy trained skills to penetrate the private domain unnoticed. In these cases the informing of consent is an abdication of responsibility rather than an honouring of it.'
> (Homan 1991 p.333)

I chose not to obtain signatures from the ex-pupils. I felt that obtaining signatures would be very easy but meaningless, for the pupils trusted me and would probably have signed anything I asked them to. This concurs with the REF recommendations that:

> 'Highly formalised or bureaucratic ways of securing consent should be avoided in favour of fostering relationships in which ongoing ethical regard for participants is sustained even after the end of the study itself has been completed.'
> (ESRC REF p.24)

I felt I was able to exercise discretion, that is 'the willingness to know and understand what is intrusive or too personal ... ... what violates an individual's right to have some inner space that belongs to no one save her- or himself' (Guba and Lincoln 1989 p.121). Precisely because I knew all of the respondents, though I had not directly taught all of them, I felt I was in a better position to sense when they may be getting uncomfortable, not wanting to continue with a particular line of questioning, or to answer a particular question or getting

distressed in any way. This did happen on occasions, though all of those occasions were quickly and easily retrieved by asking if they wanted to stop recording, stop the interview completely, stop discussing that topic etc. Sometimes I was able to sense that unease was imminent and deflect it before it became an issue by not pursuing a particular line. None of the participants ever chose not to continue with the session.

The second main principle of ethical research as described by the Belmont Report is beneficence.

Beneficence

The Belmont report expresses beneficence as an obligation to not harm, maximise possible benefits and minimize possible harms. The REF checklist's 'Avoidance of personal risk to participants also covers this area. Scrutiny of that checklist revealed three items that were possibly applicable to this work. It did involve potentially vulnerable participants, there was discussion of sensitive topics and the work had the potential to induce psychological anxiety.

I have described above how I feel I exercised discretion as to the wellbeing of participants during the interview stages. I felt it was an advantage that all of the participants were familiar with me and me with them, because I had taught them and/or known them for several years. To reduce threats to physical safety, seventeen of the interviewees were collected by me from their homes, so I was in a position to return them home safely

afterwards, the other three drove themselves. This also meant that if there had been some emotional upset they were returned to a place of safety in the immediate aftermath.

Guba and Lincoln: (1989) identified several risks of working within the constructivist paradigm (p.132). They said that necessarily intensive relationships can lead to '...violation of trust, to shading the truth, to misunderstandings regarding the purposes or relationships with other respondents on site.' I would add also to misunderstanding of relationship between researcher and respondent. Several of the respondents seemed to want more from their relationship with me than I felt able to give. Three contacted me by text message frequently, one at least daily as well as writing to me, visiting me without appointment during the school day and sending messages via third parties. I decided to never reply to text messages and explained when I saw the individuals that 'I didn't do texting'. This was sufficient except in one case when the contacts continued and developed into pleas for advice over matters personal to her. I did reply in this one instance giving what I judged to be the best advice to keep the person safe. However I was concerned that at least one individual was investing far more in the relationship than I had expected or wanted. These individuals had been contacted by me and very generously agreed to help me and yet I was denying them something in return. I went a little way to resolving the issue, at least in my own mind, by the fact that I would facilitate the meeting of all the participants at a 'thank you' party to be held towards the end of the work and that this was a better/healthier way of potentially meeting their social needs than forming relationships with me.

A second risk identified by Guba and Lincoln (1989) was the difficulty of maintaining privacy and confidentiality, especially due to reliance on direct quotation and natural language, and 'feedback loops on participants' constructions'. The participants were ensured of the confidentiality of the interviews in that measures were taken to make it impossible for them to be identified. They were referred to in the text by coded initials known only to me. The school they attended, all other schools, names of shops, factories etc. and place names are also referred to by coded initials known only to me. It is possible that the participants could recognise each other's comments; however I have ensured that there are no direct quotations in the version I shared with them though of course it is conceivable, though I believe highly unlikely, that they and their families could access the actual final work and any parts from it that may be published.

I refer to the participants by their actual names in the interviews and it was unavoidable that my peer checker should listen to some of those recordings, so it is possible that she could discover their identity though she has agreed to keep them otherwise confidential. She is professionally aware of ethics guidelines for research, and lives in a different area of the country.

Maximising benefits

Though it may seem that there was no benefit to participating in this research I did sense that the participants enjoyed the experience. The interviews were happy times and social occasions. They had the opportunity to see their old school and meet old teachers and

reminisce. I hope also that they felt it was a benefit to have someone care about their opinion, be interested in their thoughts and perhaps ultimately to make a contribution to educational practice and/or provision. I also hope that they benefited from attending the 'thank you' party and the opportunity to meet old friends.

The third and final main principle of ethical research as described by the Belmont Report is Justice. I do not believe there are big implications around justice in this work though there are some connected areas which are not covered elsewhere and which I include here.

Labelling

I am very conscious of the issues around labelling groups of people especially if this is associated with categorising people in oppressed group. I took the deliberate decision to refer to the participants as 'people who have attended special school' which I felt was more acceptable than referring to 'moderate learning difficulties' or 'intellectual impairment' etc. I also felt that the research could potentially aid in the removal of labels from some groups who are currently labelled, i.e. the work could contribute to increased inclusion.

Using or enabling people

I found this area difficult to reconcile. I was continually aware of my indebtedness to the participants and that had I not been engaged in this research I would not have made contact

with them. Suddenly I valued their knowledge but had not been interested in it before and when I had got what I wanted I probably wouldn't see them again. I had built up a relationship, got what I wanted from it and ended it. However Stalker et al. (2004 p.381) recognised that their work met a need in the young people of their study to be consulted and listened to, I hope that was also true of this work and that it can also be justified because it accessed thoughts, opinions and ideas that could not be accessed otherwise and had not been accessed before. I hope the participants felt that they and their knowledge were valued.

3.2.4 Other ethical concerns

Some issues arose which fell outside guidelines and codes but nevertheless raised ethical concerns with me. I refer to those here.

Role confusion

Sometimes participants 'opened their hearts'. Sometimes they started to get distressed, they started sentences with, 'I've never told anyone this before…' , they started to cry about past bullying, they confided that they are worried about having children because they 'don't want them to be like me'. My role then became confused: counsellor or researcher? At such times instinct takes over and one's prime concern is for the participant. I am sure this is the right action, though at such times the researcher's role becomes more 'intrusive' than one would otherwise wish.

‘Snowballing’

Some participants kindly, of their own volition, contacted other potential participants. Unfortunately they were not always suitable and it was difficult refusing tactfully.

The Integrity of the work

BERA (2009) ‘considers that all educational research should be conducted with an ethic of respect for The Quality of Educational Research.’(p.5) and Sieber (1992 p.18) expands the three ‘Belmont principles’ to six norms of research, one of which is the ‘competence of the researcher’. The work and I as the researcher have to demonstrate integrity, quality and impartiality. This is about ensuring rigour, being thorough, careful and honest, reporting fully and accurately and putting in place systems that will demonstrate that accuracy.

To this end, I have:

- kept myself informed within all areas of the work by reading, attending lectures and seminars and discussions
- benefited from supervision
- reported on all activity throughout the research process,
- checked back with interviewees that what I have reported about them was accurate in that it was a true representation of what they said and meant.

- commissioned an independent individual to check the accuracy of transcriptions, i.e. that the written record corresponded with the audio recording, and that my coding was consistent.
- attempted to triangulate data produced from interviews by using sorting, ranking and drawing exercises.
- been actively and purposefully reflexive throughout
- attempted to reveal my own prejudices or biases.
- subjected myself to peer review
- published articles in peer reviewed journals
- presented to peers and public

I have described why I believe there are ethical decisions to be made at the levels of: what to research, which paradigm to research in and how to behave ethically with human participants, treating them with respect and considering beneficence and justice. I have also described why I believe I have met the criteria for quality in this work and as a researcher.

3.3 Methods for accessing views

3.3.1 Are we accessing young people's views effectively?

The efficacy can be judged on at least two levels. Firstly, are we accessing **all** pupils' views or only those that are 'easily' accessible? Secondly are the methods we use to access views effective?

Are we accessing **all** young people's views?

In 1997 Beresford wrote of the then recent acknowledgment of failure to consult directly with children. Whilst acknowledging the boom in child centred research in sociology, education, psychology, health promotion, social policy etc. etc., she noted that consulting disabled children was a neglected area. She cited two explanations for why this had come about. Firstly, '… the belief that they cannot be sources of 'valid data…' (see notes in Appendix 3 on Donaldson's work on a different understanding of cognitive development), and secondly because of concerns that such children are vulnerable to exploitation by researchers. However, she wrote of 'compelling' reasons for 'seeking these children's accounts of their lives' (Beresford 1997 p.13). She went on to argue that accessing the disabled child's voice 'first hand' is essential if their quality of life and control over their own lives is to be maximised and abuse is to be prevented.

Wilson (2004) in a literature review concluded that there is a… '…need for research to take greater account of young disabled people's perspectives and experiences.'… but despite this and the many and varied initiatives specifically for hearing the voices of young and/or

disabled people, (The Youth Parliament, service user parliaments, 'Speaking Up' at Community Living in Cambridge, (Holman 2004), The Norah Fry Research Centre at Bristol University, The Joseph Rowntree Trust, People First Groups, 'What about Us?'), there are still concerns around whether the perspectives of young people with disabilities and the socially excluded are being sought and acted upon (Grove et al 2000, Hamill and Boyd 2002, Rose and Shevlin 2004).

Dearden (2004) is concerned about the extent to which local authorities are consulting with vulnerable young people about the services they receive. She points out that:

> 'This is different from involving young people in their care and education plans, it's about asking them what is working in a manner that values and respects their contributions and goes beyond tokenism.'
> (Dearden, J. 2004 p193)

If we are to judge by the amount of legislation it seems that there is a genuine interest in accessing and acting upon children's views. However Lewis and Porter (2004) and Rose and Shevlin (2004) find the 'reality' wanting.

> 'The emphasis from the UK government has been on formally hearing views… … It stops short of empowering and involving children and young people as partners in developing their services.'
> (Lewis and Porter 2004 p.192)

> '… despite these developments the overwhelming reality is that the voices of young people have not featured significantly in educational decision making.'
> (Rose and Shevlin 2004 p.156)

Despite much legislation specifically aimed at accessing pupils' views, and interest from within the academic community, the views of many young people and particularly the socially excluded, the less powerful, are still not being heard (Beresford 1997, Hamill and Boyd 2002, Holman 2004). Rarer still, are attempts at genuine participation, where young people themselves initiate and set the agenda.

May (2005 p.30) argues that pupils are not generally encouraged to bring about or influence their own participation, the very fact that professionals are encouraged, in a formalised way, to listen to, and act upon, the pupil's contribution, increases rather than diminishes their dependency. Even though empowerment and the reduction of dependency do not occupy uncontested positions as indisputably worthy goals for education (Robertson 2001, Nussbaum 2002, MacIntyre 1999) and I sense a danger here of devaluing the individuals who are unable to achieve full autonomy, I empathise with May's view and feel that a focus, starting in the early years, on maximising the ability of pupils to set 'their own' targets and design their own agendas would be more effective in enabling true participation and would constitute a worthy goal. The What About Us project (Byers et al 2008) demonstrated what can be done to enable the participation of young people labelled as having learning difficulties.

> 'At first, they might say things they thought they 'ought' to say. They told us things their parents or teachers might say or things they thought might please us. Some of the young people we spoke to were not really sure, at first, what their views were. This might have been either because they had not considered what they thought, because they were unsure how to express these ideas or because they had never been asked. Gradually, and with the project team and members of staff and peers in their schools and colleges offering the right kinds of support and encouragement, the young people we worked with

> became more confident and enthusiastic about sharing their thoughts and giving their views.'
> (Byers et al 2008 p.42)

If we are mostly concerned with the empowerment of pupils then I contend that it will not be achieved in an educational system which is highly institutionalized and very prescriptive. This issue is clearly one where different views of what counts as knowledge and how we access that knowledge come into conflict. If we have a positivistic view, then schooling will consist of passing on a prepared body of skills and facts. Consulting the pupil may happen in the cause of practising such skills for later life, but there would be no need for pupils to set agendas, for society has already set the agenda, it knows what the 'truth' is and has to focus on how to effectively disseminate it. However if we believe that truth is negotiated and constructed then schooling would be about enabling pupils to set agendas from the start. It would be about negotiating curricula with pupils who can be trusted to know what is best for them. I believe that the dilemma around consulting pupils is because there is a dilemma as to what schooling is about.

Clearly then there are concerns around accessing all young people's views and this is not unconnected to the second aspect of judging our efficacy in accessing views.

Are the methods we use to access views effective?

What would 'effective' mean? In assessing methods we need to be concerned that we have a method for representing people's views in a way that 'distorts' the views as little as possible. Lewis (2002, 2004) recommends that we attend to several principles which underlie the research process. They are: 'authenticity', that is how fair or representative of the person's views their account is, 'validity or credibility', that is that the researcher's interpretation is correct according to the person giving the account and 'reliability', that is how typical it is of the person's beliefs. Before considering particular methods it is perhaps helpful to investigate what the problems with accessing views might be.

Methodological problems of accessing the views of young children and young people with intellectual impairment

The literature describes how problems with eliciting information from young children and people with learning disabilities fall into four categories: problems with memory, problems with the question type and mode of questioning, problems with assumptions made by the interviewee, and problems because people have no speech. I will not discuss the latter category here as it does not apply to the participants in this work.

Problems with memory

When researching people's perspectives for a study such as this, we are less interested in some external 'absolute truth' as to what happened, than we would be if interviewing

someone for forensic purposes. When asking an ex-pupil about their perspective of their special schooling we are more concerned with their response to it than with the recall of any particular event. So Fritzley and Lee's (2003) concern with interviewing people as soon after the event as possible is irrelevant here. The distortions produced by intervening time and events (Dockrell 2004) are as important as the original experience in the context of this study which is partly concerned with the impact on the ex-pupil's subsequent life. However Dockrell does say that distortions can also be produced by... '...who is asking for the information and the context in which the memory is recalled.'(Dockrell 2004 p.161) and would be of concern in this work. Such distortions are discussed below.

This study is attempting to capture an account of the individual's perspective. For it to be as undistorted as possible there needs to be minimal input from the interviewer. Ceci and Bruck (1993) reported that free recall results in the most accurate statements. Unfortunately younger people and people with learning disabilities are unlikely to give a lengthy, uninterrupted narrative and so questioning is used to prompt the account. Dockrell (2004) writes that open ended questions produce a more accurate response but as Dent, (1986) found, for children with learning disabilities… '...general but not leading questions were most effective in term of accuracy plus fullness.' This leads to a second category of problems around eliciting information from young people and people with learning disabilities.

Problems with the question type and mode of questioning

The issues under this heading are either due to 'suggestibility' or 'acquiescence' and the tendency to give 'yes' answers to yes/no questions.

Suggestibility

For me, a definition of suggestibility would need to include intent on the part of the interviewer, or, the interviewee perceiving that the interviewer required a certain reply and this is how I have used the term in this work.

Problems with suggestibility would include: questions which communicate the answer, coercive or constricting questions, successive prompting (Kebbell 2001) and lying. Questions which communicate the answer would include leading questions to which the interviewee might yield, questions where the pattern of answering could be anticipated e.g. alternate yes no answers, and questions where use of the definite rather than indefinite article is used to elicit a positive response. Coercive or constricting questions include restricting the options in the answer, e.g. 'Were you very happy or just pleased to be in special school?', yes or no questions and either/or questions. Successive prompting can lead to confabulation, particularly in people with learning disabilities. Repeated closed questions can lead the interviewee to assume that the first response was incorrect (Lewis 2004) and rephrasing a question can have the same effect.

Acquiescence and 'I don't know answers'

Lewis (2004) describes acquiescence as the tendency to have an affirmative bias, i.e. that people, and in this case particularly young children with learning difficulties, are more likely to say 'yes' than 'no' to questions requiring a yes/no answer. She recommends, as a possible remedy, giving such children practice in saying 'no' to questions to which, even for such children, the answer is obviously 'no'.

There is a tendency for people with severe learning disabilities to acquiesce, either because it is easier and/or because they don't have the skills to contradict, and/or they don't understand the question (Grove et al 2000). Fritzley and Lee (2003) found that very young, (two-year-old), children demonstrated… '…a strong and consistent yes bias toward yes-no questions regardless of whether they are familiar or unfamiliar with an object or whether they can comprehend the question itself.' They also found that four- and five-year-olds who did not understand the question displayed a no bias (Fritzley and Lee 2003, p.1307). Lewis (2004) and Kebbell (2001) all write that the affirmative bias is more prevalent with pupils with learning disabilities.

'I don't know answers' refer to situations where, due to confusion by the question, the interviewee says, 'I don't know.' Even though they may actually be in possession of the information needed. Interviewers should aim to make their questions as comprehensible as possible and therefore need to be aware of the sorts of questions that might prove

problematic. Potentially confusing questions include: sentences which contain negatives, double negatives (Kebbell 2001) and complex vocabulary (Dockrell 2004), sentences which contain complex grammatical structures and questions about time, dates, names and numbers. However interviewers would want to encourage interviewees to admit to not understanding when there is genuine incomprehension. Lewis (2004) argues that researchers need to actively encourage 'I don't know' or 'I do not understand' answers to 'improve accuracy' of the answers given.

Not ideally placed in this section but worthy of note is Lewis's warning (2004) about using terms that the individual has not yet acquired, for when given a choice between an acquired term and one not yet acquired then the interviewee will opt for the former.

Problems with assumptions made by the interviewee

Again there is some overlap in my categories but this is due to the fact that a similar response can be made for several reasons, e.g. rephrasing or repeating a question leading to confabulation could be said to be a deliberate act on the part of the interviewer to elicit a particular response, as described above, but it could also be because the interviewee is assuming erroneously that their first answer is wrong.

Incomplete answers may be given because the interviewee assumes that the interviewer knows more than they do. They may also give incomplete answers because their perception

of the context is erroneous e.g. if a friend asks me what my thesis is about I may give a different answer to the one given to another doctoral student. If I met a stranger who asked a similar question I would have to guess at what knowledge they had in that area and might get it wrong, either giving too simplistic or too complex an explanation. Beresford (1997) exemplified this in her description of how a child gave different accounts of the experience of pain depending on the context in which the question was put, telling their mother, telling their best friend and telling the doctor.

I also include in this category, instances where interviewees change their response due to negative or no feedback because they thought this implied their original answer was wrong (Lewis 2004).

Having outlined some of the methodological problems that exist with eliciting views from young people and those with learning disabilities I will consider some of the solutions in the next section.

3.3.2 Solutions

Multi method approaches

Several authors recommend the use of multi-methods for accessing the views of young people and those with learning disabilities (Hamill and Boyd 2002, Lewis 2004, Sudman and Bradburn 1974). In an inspiring report on developing multi-methods for use with three

and four year olds in an early childhood, mainstream institution, collectively known as 'The Mosaic Approach', Clark and Moss (2001) aim for 'listening' to become embedded into relationships with children. They stress that … 'the importance is to find as many different ways of children communicating their expertise in their own lives as possible, particular methods are not important' and that children should be regarded as competent, 'experts in their own lives' who together with the adult can construct meaning. This does seem to be a useful place to start, whatever methods we use and may involve the researcher in reconsidering their role. However this method is more about child centred approaches and pupils setting the agenda than accessing their specific views on a topic or accounts of an event. It is an approach that would seem to be completely in line with May's (2005) ideas of what constitutes true participation, (see above), but not as helpful to the researcher with a quite specific agenda.

Among the methods recommended in The Mosaic Approach are pupils taking pictures with cameras, drawing maps, doing tours of the school, modelling, collage, puppetry, etc., all of which enable pupils to focus on their priorities and to show what interests them. Though this approach was originally for listening to young, mainstream children, I have adapted and used some of the methods successfully with older pupils in a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Mortimer (2004) also suggests the use of art and photography, story lines, play based approaches, observation and interpretation as methods for listening to young or non-verbal children. Similar methods mentioned by other authors are drawings and written material in any combination, 'talking mats', focus groups where no adult is present, the use of visual analogies such as colouring histograms, sentence completion exercises, the use of 'story stems' where the child is motivated by the first stage

of a story and then continues the story, possibly using puppets, repertory grids and 'cue cards' (Lewis 2002, 2004). These methods can be used in as many combinations as necessary to triangulate the findings of one particular method, but multi-method approaches can be labour intensive, expensive (Beresford 1997) and time consuming (Lewis et al 2005)

Suggestions and guidelines for eliciting views

Besides the multi-method approach various authors have produced guidelines for eliciting views. Beresford (1997) suggests: using the child's level of language. Tomlinson (1989) advocated only using the language that the child has already used to avoid interview interference. Whilst I appreciate that the level of language must be appropriate I think that restricting oneself to words that have been uttered by the child could be rather limiting. Other suggestions from Beresford (1997) are: talking alongside doing something else, the breaking down of abstract and complex sentences, naturalistic approaches such as discussion and observation where the individual lives and/or works, the use of specific and concrete questions and the use of non-verbal methods. Non-verbal methods she includes are: the use of symbols, observation of body language, pointing and 'posting', (putting e.g. likes/dislikes into sorting boxes). She also stresses that knowledge of the person is essential. Lewis (2004) advocates using statements rather than questions, an appropriate level of generality as opposed to highly specific questions and she warns that the issue of what would constitute the ideal style of questioning needs more research.

Group interviews

Group interviews are not a substitute for individual interviews, but they can be used as Lewis (1992) describes: to test a specific research question about consensus beliefs, to obtain greater depth and breadth in responses than occurs in individual interviews, to verify research plans or findings, and to enhance the reliability of interviewee responses.

Lewis describes the advantages that group interviews have over individual ones: they can be supportive for reluctant people, they can produce richer data due to the interaction of the participants and they can be used to verify data derived from other methods However, she suggests that group interviewing requires more skill and sensitivity from the interviewer.

If using group interviews to elicit views Beresford (1997) advises grouping according to age and gender if necessary, limiting the length of the interview to suit the pupils age/ability, and restricting interviews to discussion of one topic per session.

Aiming for the uninterrupted narrative

Lewis (2004) recommends the uninterrupted narrative as a way of countering the, '…dangers of recurrent and over-specific prompting as well as possibly inadvertent misinformation…' Saywitz and Snyder (1996) tested a new procedure called 'narrative elaboration' which was, '… designed to expand children's spontaneous reports of past

events, reducing the need for leading questions.' They found that with this procedure children, '… demonstrated a fifty-three percent improvement in spontaneous recall over the control group, without compromising accuracy.'

Saywitz and Snyder (1996) describe how young children have not yet developed the structures which support their ability to accurately recall events which have happened to them. These structures called scripts, '… guide attention, retrieval, and retention processes' (p.1348). Though they quote research in Dickson (1981) that finds that children find it difficult to understand what the listener's prior knowledge of the topic is and of the necessity to explain to the listener the time, place and perspective of the event, I find that scrutiny of the various papers in Dickson reveals that this is an oversimplification of a complex area. However to ameliorate these deficiencies Saywitz and Snyder taught a strategy for aiding the children's recall by, '…organising the elements of an event into categories thought to be psychologically salient constructs that guide event recall…' (p.1348). They represent the categories as a series of simple line drawings and the children are trained in how the cards are to be used. The children are initially asked for an uninterrupted narrative and afterwards they are shown the cards and asked if they remind them of anything else to say. Saywitz and Snyder found that as well as the improvement in spontaneous recall mentioned above,

> 'Children accessed information with this novel technique that they did not recall spontaneously. This was accomplished without the use of leading questions and without affecting responses to follow-up questions.'
> (Saywitz and Snyder 1996 p 1354)

They are cautious about the ecological validity of the study (p.1355) and advise that future studies are needed.

Lewis (2002) suggested the use of this 'cue card' approach to structure the narratives of pupils with difficulties in learning. She reports the using of six cue cards, which, '…acted as prompts for ideas.'(Lewis 2002 p.114) Children practised using the cards in 'routine story activities' and then, over a series of weeks, they recounted stories, (events from the previous week), to Lewis both unprompted and prompted using cue cards. Lewis states that, 'The prompted account clearly generated much more detail than did the unprompted account…' (p.114) and that they were more accurate. She found that the advantages of using the cue cards were sustained… '…across a range of children and events...' …except when they were used with pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.

There are then some solutions to the difficulties of accessing the perspectives of young people labelled as having learning difficulties. In accessing their views we would do well to use a variety of methods and be as unobtrusive as possible whether or not we use prompts or cues to aid the process. We must be particularly attentive to the language we use and how we use it.

Summary

Due to a changing construction of childhood, changing ideas around cognitive development and changes in legislation there is a much greater awareness of, and interest in, issues around accessing, listening to and acting on what young people, including those labelled as having learning difficulties, have to say. But there are methodological problems around doing this effectively, perhaps particularly, with those labelled as having learning difficulties and some solutions are suggested.

I trialled some of the suggested methods and selected those which seemed the most effective for the purposes of this project (see report of pilot studies below).

3.4 Research design

After carrying out pilot studies to test various methods of eliciting views from pupils and ex-pupils I embarked on the main study. The sample consisted of twenty ex-pupils of a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and other complex difficulties. The ex pupils ranged in age from nineteen to twenty-seven years of age.

Ex-pupils were interviewed using semi-structured interview which was audio recorded and transcribed. They were then invited to a follow-up interview(s). During these sessions they checked their responses from the first session, sorted words and phrases they had introduced

in the first session according to whether they applied to mainstream or special school, diamond ranked the same words and phrases and either drew pictures or listed words under the headings: mainstream school, special school and the school that everyone could go to and be happy.

Transcripts and data from other methods were analysed with the aid of Nvivo 2.0 software. Sorting, diamond ranking exercises and drawings or word lists were used to check the trustworthiness of responses given during the conversation, i.e. was the response 'typical of what the [person] believed' (Lewis 2002 p113). Diamond ranking and drawings or word lists were also used to access more data.

A three stage reliability test by an independent worker in the same field was completed.

Findings were reported on and shared in an appropriate format with participants at a debriefing session/thank you party at the end of the study.

3.4.1 Pilot Studies

The pilot studies carried out illustrate how the work developed and eventually became focused (see grid of events Appendix 4). Initially I had wanted to continue work started during studies for my Masters degree on the self-esteem of pupils who attended special

school. I wrote a short paper (see Appendix 5) outlining a small study to investigate self-esteem in matched cohorts of pupils in special and mainstream schools. As a precursor I decided to investigate and trial methods of assessing self-esteem.

Pilot Study 1: An investigation of tools for measuring self-esteem

I listed and described seventeen different methods of investigating self-esteem (see Appendix 6) and decided that seven were worth trialling, the others were discounted for various reasons: difficulty in accessing rights to use the test, lack of validity/reliability data, the need for training in the use of the tool and, the concepts involved were too complex for the participants in this study. Not all of the tools were published self-esteem tests. I was becoming interested in accessing pupils' views to possibly give insight into self-esteem and so I included ideas such as interviewing groups of pupils, interviewing individual pupils, and pupils drawing and talking about their drawings.

I obtained permission to trial these methods first from the headteacher of the special school in which I was teaching, secondly from the parents or guardians of the pupils, who were asked to opt their son/daughter in to the study (see letter to parents, Appendix 7) and, thirdly, from the pupils themselves at the start of the work. I felt that I could justify using pupils' English lessons for carrying out this work because, the work met many of the speaking and listening targets of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998) and could therefore be built into the programme of learning, and all pilots took no more than two lessons to administer.

The seven methods that were trialled included:

- two published self esteem measuring tools
- very loosely structured group interviews, where a small group of up to eight pupils were asked to talk about their previous mainstream school. The interviews were semi-structured in that any questions asked were open ended and usually started with 'Tell me about...'. I did not use prepared questions but preferred the flexibility of listening to pupil responses and asking them to tell me more. I started the session by asking them to tell me about other schools they had attended. This was extended by asking how other schools were different from the school they were now attending. Other ways of extending conversation were to ask: how they felt about something they had described, what they meant by something they had said, why they did something they had described and to explain particular detail. I asked what was good about their old school and the current one and which school they would send their own children to in the future. I asked them if anyone had ever been 'not very nice to them' because they came to the school they now attended
- individual interviews during which I followed up issues which had arisen in the group interviews
- pupils drawing an aspect of their previous school and then talking to me about it
- pupils drawing and then talking to each other about their drawing without an adult present, this conversation was audio recorded and the pupils knew I would listen to it afterwards

- one pupil talking about their experiences into an audio recorder without an adult present.

Pilot Study 1: Results

The two published self-esteem tests were easy to administer, consumed relatively very little time and gave a numerical measure of the individual's self-esteem and in the case of the B/G STEEM test (Maines et al 1993) also included items to test the pupil's sense of locus of control. However by the time I had completed Pilot Study 1 I was starting to become more interested in what pupils had to say of their experiences rather than in numerical measures of self-esteem. I was therefore now interested in finding effective ways of eliciting these views.

The method that yielded most talk at this stage was the semi-structured group interview. This had provided me with good practice in asking open, non-leading questions and in listening carefully to and extending pupil talk.

In a group of eight pupils, three tended to dominate, but all made some contribution, including some quite lengthy uninterrupted narratives. All pupil talk was transcribed. Coding the transcript of the semi-structured interviews revealed that the pupils' talk was in the following broad categories:

- Relationships with peers/friendships

- Relationships with teaching staff
- Behaviour
- Experiences: positive and negative in mainstream and special school- (bullying)
- Emotions: positive and negative
- Isolation/belonging: in mainstream school and local community
- Learning difficulties

See Table 1 for a summary of, and comments on, the results of these trials.

My notes of 16.09.03 (see Appendix 8) show that, at this stage, I was still planning a quantitative study supplemented by eliciting pupil's views by interview, and was planning to extend the investigation to '...interview ex-pupils (recent and less recent leavers) about their experience of special education.'

However Pilot Study 1 had demonstrated that pupils often found recalling events difficult; frequently, when asked to draw a picture of something to do with their last school, pupils replied that they couldn't remember anything.

A record of supervision dated 19. 02. 04, (see Appendix 9) confirms that as a result of attending a subject module on 'Educational Disability and Special Needs' I had decided that my ... '... focus for research should move from self-esteem to "pupils and ex-pupils experiences of special school", and that I was advised to consider using 'cue cards' to access data. I hoped that the use of cue cards would aid the difficulties with memory

identified above. This method which is referred to in Section 2.2 of this work was described by Lewis (2002) as a strategy for accessing 'authentic', 'valid and reliable' narratives from children, especially those with learning difficulties. Lewis reported that a modified version of this method had been used effectively with pupils aged six to twelve and who attended a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The cue cards consist of a set of six cards each displaying a simple, symbolic picture which after training in their use, cues the child to report on an aspect on an event. The cues are: people, talk, setting- indoor and outdoor, feelings and consequences (see Appendix 10). The method had originated from forensic work, where the 'untainted' report of the child was essential and therefore the less input from the interviewer the better. It is based on work by Fivush (1991) on how the ability of young children to remember and report on events, particularly traumatic ones, develops.

Cue cards appealed to me because it had been found that:

- they could produce data which was 'uncontaminated' by the need for the interviewer to have much verbal input, and therefore minimise the occurrence of things said by the interviewer which may threaten the '… authenticity, credibility and reliability…' of the child's account (Lewis 2004).
- they… '…generated much more detail than did the unprompted account…' (Lewis 2002).
- accounts produced using them had been shown to be more accurate (Lewis 2002)

Pilot Study 2: Using Cue Cards

Between May and July of 2004 I undertook the training of a group of year eight pupils in the use of cue cards. I wanted to find out if the method would elicit more data, compared with the interviewer merely asking the questions implied by the symbols and compared with a semi-structured interview.

I obtained permission to do this pilot work from parents, the head of the school and this time, as advised by the headteacher, from the school governors (see Appendix 11 for response from school governors). Prior to the first session I attempted to obtain 'informed consent' from the pupils. I referred in Section 3.2 to the difficulties of obtaining informed consent from one's own pupils. It is a dubious procedure for a number of reasons. It is questionable whether pupils are truly free to refuse to do something that they know their teacher wants them to do. It is difficult, no matter how well intentioned, for the teacher to offer genuine alternatives to the pupil and it is questionable whether some pupils with learning difficulties have a real understanding of the purposes of the research and its implications for them. I decided subsequently that rather than the seeking of their consent as a tokenistic gesture, I would seek to ensure that the procedure could be justified as educational and in line with National Curriculum English objectives and not to give them the option of opting out. I would probably not take the same decision now for reasons outlined in Section 3.2.

Method	Description of use	Sample	Comments
B/G-STEEM	Designed to be used by children as young as 6yrs and in British schools. Easily administered to groups. Easily marked Used primary scale	7 pupils (5 boys, 2 girls)	'Worked well' Easily administered Includes locus of control items
Lawseq- slightly adapted	16 questions- Yes/No easily administered to groups easily marked	50 secondary age pupils	"blunt tool" "worked" in previous study Easy to administer
Group Interviews	Loosely structured questions eliciting their thoughts on their previously attended mainstream schools	2 sessions (total 1 hour) 8 x yr 8pupils	Be prepared to ask more direct questions
Individual Interviews	Used to extend issues which arose in group interviews		Some very revealing comments from the pupils. Very time consuming doing the transcript.9hrs to do 1hr of tape. About 1/3 of conversation was "useful" Would use in conjunction with statistical tests.
Pupil's drawings + commentary	Pupils draw pictures of something that happened in previous school or earlier in current school Comments to the teacher about the picture were recorded Pupils asked each other questions about their pictures in private but conversations were taped with their permission	8 x yr 8 pupils	Comments were more revealing than the pictures Quite difficult to motivate the drawing, initially some refused – but only one was steadfast. Quite time consuming for the "returns"
Pupils drawing in pairs and talking to each other.	No adult present, audio recorded, pupils knew I would listen to them later.	4 x yr 8pupils	Pupils easily distracted Not so data rich
Individual private accounts	Pupils spoke into an audio recorder individually and in private, about school experiences. They knew I would listen to them afterwards.	1 x yr 8 pupil	Only tried very briefly with one pupil, but I think it could have great potential as follow up to group interview.

Table1: Comments on some methods trialled to elicit self-esteem measures and pupil's talk

The Training Sessions

For a detailed description of the first four training sessions, the amendments that were subsequently made to the cue cards and the way they were presented (see Appendix 13).

The Fifth Session of Training in the use of Cue cards

Method

Four pupils were interviewed individually. They were reminded of the cue card symbol Power-Point slides by running through them with the teacher and the new "feelings" slide was introduced and explained. It was then explained that they were to tell the teacher something that had happened at home or in school recently "perhaps last week". They were asked to first tell the story and that the teacher would not interrupt at all except to ask if they had finished. Then they were to be asked to tell about the same event but using the cue cards on the Power Point presentation, and that they would control the speed at which they went through the presentation. The teacher would not interrupt nor answer questions except to ask if they had finished. The four year eight pupils were SC, UK, SX and IF. The pupils were thanked at the start and end.

Results

Pupil	Words without cue cards	Words with cue cards	Items of information without cue cards	Items of information with cue cards
SC	65	134	17	24
UK	82	169	14	29
SX	55	86	11	20
IF	66	108	15	22
Totals	**278**	**497**	**57**	**95**

Table 2: Number of words and number of items of information spoken by pupils without and with aid of cue cards.

(For more detailed results of the fifth training session using cue cards including transcripts see Appendix 14.)

Some observations from the fifth session of training with cue cards

The use of cue cards came close to doubling both the number of words spoken and the amount of information delivered (see Table 2). We have to remember though that in each case the use of cue cards **followed** the telling of the story unaided and that therefore the subjects may have "warmed" to their story by this time, however it would not have been sensible to use the cue cards first.

With the cue cards the subjects became much more focused in what they were telling. In other words they selected one aspect of the event they had already told and

described it in much more detail. One can imagine how useful this would be in forensic work.

Though this pilot showed that use of the cue cards could at least double the number of words produced and the items of information communicated, I decided not to use this as a method for the following reasons:

- Training was very time consuming and I felt would therefore 'test' the generosity of interviewees
- The method seemed more suitable for eliciting facts, as in a forensic setting, and unsuitable for eliciting ideas, thoughts and beliefs
- Though in the context in which I piloted the method there was a doubling of text produced, and the data was produced almost completely without input from the researcher, I did not think it would elicit the quantity of data I wanted.

Other methods

In my search for suitable methods of eliciting pupils' perspectives of school I also trialled: pupils using digital cameras around school independently and talking about the photographs they had taken, a method recommended by Clark and Moss (2001), and ranking exercises.

Using cameras

In order to elicit the pupil's perspective of school life to be used during their annual review meeting, six pupils, working in pairs, were given a digital camera and asked to take pictures around school of whatever they wished. They were given this deliberately 'loose' brief as I wanted to know what they would prioritise. In retrospect the brief was probably too 'loose' as pupils returned with an apparently random set of photos and pupils found it difficult to explain what the photo meant to them other than, 'It's a picture of...' With more expert guidance from the researcher, I can envisage that such a method would aid communication with pupils, especially those with more severely impaired communication skills; however, I did not find that it added to what pupils had already told me in interview.

Ranking exercises

For the ranking exercises I wrote on blank cards words or phrases which the pupils had introduced in interview and asked them to rank them in priority order, i.e. the one that mattered to them most was placed at the top and the one that mattered least was placed at the bottom with all others ranked appropriately in between (see Appendix 15 for sample of one pupil's 'diamond' ranked phrases). This sometimes worked well in that it could be used to support or refute information shared in interview and sometimes introduced extra discussion, but some pupils found ranking sometimes loosely related concepts in order of priority challenging if not impossible.

Refocusing

I was fortunate to have a foster daughter who had attended the special school where I taught and I began to consider that it would be very informative to hear what views of special education she and her friends would have especially as they had had time to experience and reflect on how attending special school had impacted on their lives since leaving school.

Pilot Study 3: Ex pupils and semi-structured interviews

I trialled semi-structured interviews with a group of ex-pupils in their thirties. I planned a programme (see Record of Supervision 30/11/04- Appendix 16) for carrying out the interviews. At this stage I was considering interviewing this group who had left school in the 1990s **and** a group that were current pupils. (See Appendix 17 for detailed proposal for this pilot study.)

Initially, I shared what I planned to do and why with my foster daughter who had attended the special school where I taught and who was to be one of the interviewees; her friends who had attended special school at the same time would form the rest of the group. I also shared with her the questions I would ask and asked for her comments, accordingly there were some slight changes to the questions. At the next meeting I interviewed my foster daughter alone to trial the questions and subsequently there were two meetings: me with three interviewees together and me with two interviewees together. All conversations were transcribed and preliminary coding was carried out.

The method seemed to work in that there was a relaxed atmosphere, people spoke at reasonable length and themes started to emerge. However I decided not to proceed with this cohort, for three reasons:

- I felt there were ethical issues around my foster daughter participating in my research
- These ex-pupils were all very positive about their experience at special school and I felt that if I contacted more participants via them and their contacts they were likely to have the same positive feelings and less likely to have negative feelings
- These ex-pupils were in their mid thirties and I felt that their experience of special school could possibly be discounted because it was not recent enough

The method of semi-structured interviewing did seem to elicit sufficient quantity and quality data. I decided that an optimal number of individuals to be interviewed at once would be two. Organisationally it would be difficult to arrange for members of a large group to attend at the same time, some individuals could 'hide' in a larger group, one or two may dominate and 'member checking' of data might prove problematic. With just two interviewees, I felt, that they would give confidence to each other, audio-recording and member checking would be facilitated, I could prevent domination by one individual and finding a mutually convenient date would be easier.

Pilot Study 4: Hierarchical Focusing

As a result of piloting semi-structured interviewing several issues had emerged:

- What questions need to be asked?
- How is an uninterrupted narrative produced?
- How does the researcher ensure coverage of the agenda without erring regards suggestibility?

I discovered a system of questioning which allowed for …

> '… 'having it both ways' in research interviewing: that is for remaining open enough to gain access to interviewee's construals whilst nevertheless ensuring that they are consulted on the whole of the researcher's agenda.'
> (Tomlinson, P. 1989 p162)

This method, known as hierarchical focussing, seemed to address each of the issues. Tomlinson describes five stages to the process.

Initial analysis of domain

At this stage the researcher, 'makes explicit to themselves the nature of their own construal of a topic domain.' Tomlinson suggests that this will have a hierarchical structure and that it will be broader than the focus of the interview. I have reproduced in Fig. 1 below an illustration of my own very simple 'construal of the domain' at the time.

Education in Special School:

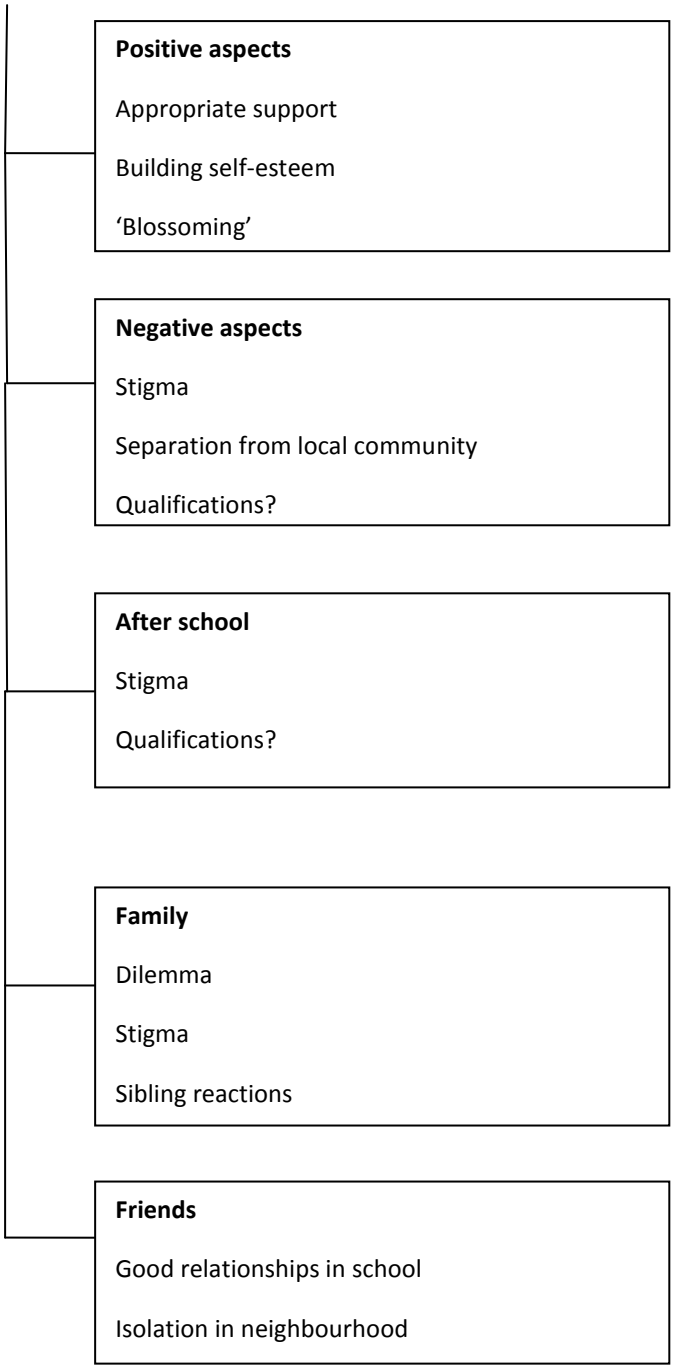


Fig. 1 The 'special school experience' domain as perceived by author before main study was begun

Selection of Research Interview Sub-domain

The sub-domain is the specific area to be covered in the interview as opposed to the normally larger area covered by the domain. For me the sub-domain differed very little from the domain.

Construction of interview agenda- an agenda of questions is set out hierarchically or arbitrarily if there is no hierarchy.

Although I did not produce an interview agenda as elaborate as Tomlinson's (1989 p.166), I did produce an agenda for the proposed interview with sub-sections which were to be covered by the end of the session (see Appendix 18).

The interview-

a) Elicit spontaneous accounts- aim for 'spontaneity exhaustion. Use 'active listening' techniques. The most open question comes first and if answers to other questions are answered spontaneously this is noted. Only prompt with words already used by the interviewee.
b) Ensure that all general questions are exhausted before more specific questions are asked.

I trialled this method of interviewing during the main study as I had become aware that during interviews I had sometimes missed opportunities to elicit important data. I found the method too cumbersome. It did not allow for spontaneity and was at least a distraction and sometimes an impoliteness as I had to pause to read my notes and

frequently ‘lost the thread’ of what we had been talking about. As the interviewing progressed I became more proficient and found that I could get exhaustive data more efficiently.

3.4.2 Developing and Changing Focus

Because of my exposure to more interpretive methods, growing awareness of disability rights and increasing respect for the knowledge of people who had experienced special education, my focus was now purely on eliciting the views of people who attended special school. I was now concerned with achieving an understanding of what sense the pupils made of their school experience. I wanted to elicit personal accounts in the hope of sharing this with those who make decisions about the education of similar pupils so that those decisions could be better informed. Such work can be described as ‘phenomenological’ in its approach.

> ‘A phenomenological study focuses on the essence or structure of an experience (phenomenon). It is an attempt to be able to describe the meaning of an experience from the perspective of the person who experiences it.’
> (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004 p.97)

The phenomenological approach

Phenomenology is... ‘...a reasoned enquiry which discovers the inherent essences of appearances... ... an appearance is anything of which one is conscious.’ (Stewart, 1974

p.3). I do not intend to devote the many pages it would take to even simply outline the development of phenomenology, in any case as Stewart warns '[p]henomenology... ...is not a rigid school or uniform discipline.' and '[t]here is great diversity in the points of view...' of this approach, but I will briefly refer to, and simply explain the 'basic themes' on which, according to Stewart, phenomenological philosophy is centred (Stewart 1974 p.4). They are: 'a return to the traditional tasks of philosophy, the search for a philosophy without presuppositions, the intentionality of consciousness, and the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy' (Stewart1974 p.5).

1) A return to the traditional tasks of philosophy

Stewart (1974) explains how by the end of the nineteenth century the role of philosophy changed from achieving an understanding of the world to one of subservience to positivist/natural scientific enquiry, that is, if the 'truth' could not be revealed using scientific method then it was pointless. Phenomenology was an attempt to revert philosophical enquiry to its original role.

2) A philosophy without presuppositions

Researchers using the phenomenological approach should attempt to 'suspend all judgments' (Stewart 1974, p7) or 'bracket' (Denzin and Lincoln p489, 2000, Finlay 2008 p2) prior assumptions. This is not a call to be objective in the scientific method sense, but for the researcher to temporarily forget any prior 'taken for granted' knowledge or prejudices the researcher may have about the

area being researched, and to listen in an unencumbered way to what participants are saying about their experience.

3) The intentionality of consciousness.

We cannot talk of consciousness unless it is in relation to something, that is, we are always conscious **of** something and our understanding of that thing or its meaning to us is an essentially interactive process; it is a nonsense to talk of consciousness of something without meaning being attached to the something.

> '...the focus is on the intentional relationship between the person and the meanings of the things they're focusing on and experiencing.'
> (Finlay 2008 p.2)

4) The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy

Because, from the phenomenological perspective, consciousness cannot be separated from consciousness **of** something it is not useful to distinguish between subject and object, the object and the subject's understanding of the object are inseparable. Phenomenology is not concerned with discovering a reality that exists outside of our consciousness. The phenomenologist is therefore not concerned with the researcher distancing themselves from the object of their research which would be associated with the natural science, positivistic approach.

Finlay explains that...

> 'The challenge for phenomenological researchers is twofold: how to help participants express their world as directly as possible; and how to explicate these

> dimensions such that the lived world – the life world - is revealed.
> (Finlay 2008 p 2)

The phenomenological approach is nevertheless rigorous in attempting to access authentic, credible and trustworthy data, allowing the findings to emerge from the data and ensuring that data is exhaustive. The researcher must achieve a high level of intellectual honesty and must be prepared to demonstrate that they have done that.

Ensuring a rigorous approach

I will set out here how, and to what extent, I believe this work meets this required standard of rigour.

In attempting to demonstrate that the work accessed exhaustive, authentic, credible and trustworthy data I will address factors that may have threatened this, and describe how the work attempted to overcome those threats.

The sample was relatively large at twenty and it may be a criticism of the work that this prevented as in depth an investigation as may have been possible with a smaller sample. In its defence, I always felt that I had as exhaustive an account of the ex-pupils' perspective as it was possible to access, irrespective of how much time may have been available. That is not to say that in retrospect I did not recognise places in their transcripts where there were missed opportunities for follow-up questions which

may have enhanced the data. I believe every participant made a unique contribution to the work which would therefore have been omitted had the sample been reduced.

To ensure reliability/trustworthiness of the data, i.e. how typical (rather than how representative) it is of the beliefs of the person, I attempted to use open ended cues rather than specific questions, as recommended by Lewis (2002). 'Tell me about...' was usually the way I started conversations. This is not to say that questions requiring only yes/no answers were never used. The use of multi methods; interview, sorting, ranking and drawings helped to ensure that the responses were typical and consistently held. Whilst the perfect interview, in terms of the views expressed being typical of the beliefs of the person being interviewed, will probably never be achieved, it is important to provide optimal conditions for a reliable response.

To maximise authenticity, i.e. how fair or representative of the person's views their account is, Lewis (2002 p. 113) suggests we should be wary of 'features which may distort' the response, such as the relationship of the researcher with the person and the tendency to acquiesce. I have addressed this in the previous chapter (see p.68) and in the previous section and for the reasons already stated do not believe it limits this work.

With the exception of one participant, whose contribution I will discuss below, I am confident in the authenticity of the ex-pupils' responses.

It is true that these ex-pupils were talking retrospectively; they had left special school at least three years previously, most of them within the last six years and in one instance as much as eleven years previously. However, as explained above, I felt it was beneficial that the ex-pupils had had time to reflect on their experience, and had time to experience what effect, if any, attending special school had had on their life subsequent to leaving, (see Tony's comment on his drawing p.142 for a description of how it had taken time for him to consider the effect of attending special school). All reports are retrospective, even if made immediately after the experience, and in a study such as this we are interested in long term effects as well as the experience at the time. Therefore confabulation, or filling gaps in memory with their latest rather than their contemporary view, is not problematic, the lasting impression is as important as the initial.

The work may have been limited by psychological defensiveness (Hycner 1985 p.296) which occurs subconsciously when a participant gives a particular response which is based more on preserving their psychological wellbeing than on representing an 'accurate' description of 'facts'. For example a pupil may say they were not bullied because they were so traumatised by bullying that the instances of bullying have been blocked from their conscious memory. I suggest that this could also be a conscious act when it is easier to deny bullying than to risk the necessity of recounting a particular traumatising instance. The possibility of either of these occurring can only be reduced not removed. Hopefully they can be recognised by the skilled judgement of the researcher and reduced by sensitive handling of the interview. I was not aware that this phenomenon happened in this work but I do not deny the possibility that it did.

Validity, or credibility, is about whether what I concluded the participants were talking about was what they actually meant. I believe there is evidence in the transcripts of my attempts to verify what they were saying by repeating, rephrasing and revisiting topics to validate what had been said. Again I believe this was also facilitated by my prior familiarity with and knowledge of the participants. I am nevertheless conscious of times when I...

- '**put words in their mouths'** such as when talking to Darren about the shortcomings of mainstream schools I asked him if he meant that classes were 'bigger' which he then used to describe the classes.

- ...**misled them**, such as when asking Tracey to tell me anything she liked about the special school meaning anything she wanted to, and I subsequently realised she had told me the things she **liked** about the special school.

- **...interrupted inappropriately** as when talking with Brian and Tony, when by interrupting too soon I cut short explanations which they had started but never consequently finished

- ...**missed opportunities to elicit more data** as when talking to Tony and he raised the idea that he would have had more confidence had he gone to mainstream school which I did not follow up:

- ...**strayed from my role as disinterested interviewer** as when I advised Brian that he could find out about his diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome on the

internet. (Though I would argue that it is not the role of the interviewer in phenomenological research to be disinterested.)

I believe that there was a possible threat to validity/credibility because of the use of ranking methods. The participants' difficulties with this exercise were partly due to my insistence that the participants should only rank words and phrases they had used; a decision which I stand by, and to my lack of skill in selecting suitable words and phrases. Some individuals were attempting to rank 'being happy' compared with 'good school' for example, a task most people would find challenging.

To ensure credibility of the work, respondents were all given the opportunity to check that what had been transcribed was a true record of what they had said and what they had meant (as described in Chapter 3.2.3). They were given the chance to remove any section without question. Eighteen of the twenty participants took the opportunity to attend the second interview, two (Hannah, Ewan) did not attend subsequent meetings and so missed that opportunity.

In an attempt to further check whether the findings truly represented what the participants had intended they were all invited to a final meeting to share and discuss findings as described in Ch 3.5. Eight attended and several apologies were received. Each was given a participant's copy of the findings (Appendix 22) which was also posted to those who did not attend. Conscious of the fact that some participants had difficulties with reading, I read through the findings. They made no comment about

them, but when I asked if they were able to identify the described groups to which they belonged there was general agreement that they could. In retrospect this was not an ideal situation in which to check that the ex-pupils felt their perspective had been adequately represented. They were unlikely to challenge findings in front of a large group and perhaps this exercise should have been carried out on a one to one basis, even then it is unlikely that they would challenge what someone in authority, a previous teacher of theirs, presented to them. The use of an independent facilitator may have been more effective.

I have attempted to be as honest and open as possible in this work. The phenomenological approach does not tempt the researcher into making results 'fit' an hypothesis. In this approach the analysis should be as grounded in the data as it is possible for a human to achieve. It is possible that when looking for theoretical 'fit', such as in this work with social identity theory, some supportive evidence could be emphasised and other less supportive evidence ignored. I do not believe this to be the case in this work, I was careful to describe instances where the evidence did not 'fit', and I was careful to describe all pertinent data. I have no concerns regarding the intellectual honesty of this work. However I am conscious that this is one person's 'take' on the phenomena, there are other avenues that I could have researched further had time allowed; where I felt this was the case I noted it in the text.

Hycner (1985 p. 300) warns against interpreting data 'according to some already developed theory' and I agree that ultimately analysing the data within a social identity theory framework seems to run contra to my description of phenomenological

work at the beginning of this section. However, I suggest that it would have been intellectually dishonest not to discuss the results in the light of social identity theory because the data seemed to so completely surrender itself to such analysis that it was difficult to ignore. I do not believe this detracted from the earlier in depth analysis of the data.

As a further test of its validity/credibility, this work has been shared at various stages with peers, colleagues, teachers, academics and other education professionals as described above and has benefited from their criticism. They have also been informally shared with several lay people.

In rigorous research it is expected that the researcher must be continually mindful of the threats and limitations referred to above. The onus is on them to be vigilant, to be aware of and expose any shortcomings, so that the reader can then make the judgment as to the authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness of the data. I believe I have met those expectations in this work.

3.4.3 Conclusions

After much reflection and consideration of information gained via the various pilot studies I decided that:

- Participants would be **ex**-pupils. From my experience of interviewing the ex-pupils, as opposed to the then current pupils, I recognised that they had had time to reflect on, and experience how, special schooling had affected their

lives after leaving compulsory education, and felt that they might provide richer data.

- Participants would be **recent** ex-pupils as opposed to the pilot group who were in their thirties.

- Data would be elicited using semi-structured interview, sorting and diamond ranking exercises and participant drawings annotated during subsequent discussion. This latter method was in fact selected after I had started the main study. I trialled it with one early participant and found it extended the data available from interview, using this method concepts emerged which had not been mentioned during interview.

- Though my sample size of twenty was much more than the six recommended by Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) for a phenomenological study, I felt this could only enhance the work.

3.5 The Main Study

The sample

The pilot studies that I had carried out as described in Section 3.4 included: year eight and year nine pupils then attending a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and a small group of ex students from the same school, then in their thirties. Ultimately I rejected both of these age ranges. I have described in section 3.4

(Pilot study 3, p. 89) my reasons for not choosing the group of ex-pupils in their thirties to participate in the main study.

The year eight and nine pupils, I felt, had less experience to draw upon and less ability to reflect on their experiences. Accessing them for extended periods of time would be impractical without disruption of their normal curriculum which I considered to be, unethical and impractical for me as a teacher in the school and something for which I was unlikely to get permission. There were other ethical considerations such as the likelihood or not of obtaining genuinely informed consent from parents and pupils which finally persuaded me not to choose this age range as a population from which to draw a sample.

The population from which I finally planned to draw the sample included all pupils whom I had taught in the years beginning September 1995, 1996 and 1997, except for four pupils with autistic spectrum disorders for whom I felt the experience would be too distressing and two who had unfortunately died. This meant that there was a potential of forty-five ex-pupils, ranging in their then current age from nineteen to twenty-four years. I estimated that of these, approximately twenty would be both contactable and willing to take part, and would form my sample. I was encouraged to use this sample on the grounds that they would have the maturity to reflect on their experiences and that their experience was relevant in that it was relatively recent.

Contacting twenty ex-pupils from this group proved difficult. Some declined to take part when the third party first requested their participation, others initially agreed and then either didn't keep their appointment or subsequently declined. After one year of searching for ex-pupils within these parameters I decided to widen the age range and after two years was able to locate twenty ex-pupils who would agree to be interviewed. Their age and gender were as shown in Table 3.

Age at interview (years)	Number and gender of interviewees of that age
19	3 (all female)
20	5 (4 males, 1 female)
21	1 (female)
22	4 (1 female,3 male)
23	4 (1 female, 3 male)
24	-
25	-
26	2 (1 female, 1 male)
27	1(female)

Table 3: Numbers of interviewees showing age and gender.

There was a 11: 9 male: female representation, which meant that females were over represented in the sample; normally the gender representation in moderate learning difficulty special schools is closer to 2: 1 male: female.

Experience of mainstream schools

Half (ten) of the twenty ex-pupils had attended mainstream primary schools and transferred to the special school at the start of year 7. Two ex-pupils had no experience of mainstream education. The other eight all had some experience, ranging

from about one year to five years. None of the ex-pupils had directly experienced mainstream secondary education (See Table 4).

Ex-pupil	Duration of experience of mainstream education
Amy	2 years
Barry	6 years
Bella	6 years
Brian	6 years
Daniel	Some experience (unknown length)
Darren	1 year
David	6 years
Diane	6 years
Ewan	6 years
Hannah	6 years
Kirk	Not known (possibly 2 years)
Maria	6 years
Mizzie	Approx 2 years (Probably until 7years old)
Nadine	No experience of mainstream education
Naomi	Brief experience only
Simon	5 years
Terry	No experience of mainstream education
Tim	6 years
Tony	Approx 1 year
Tracey	6 years

Table 4: Ex-pupils' experience of mainstream education

Methods

Making contact

The ways in which ex-pupils were contacted are summarised in the table below (Table 5).

Number of pupils	*Method of contact*
6	*Via parents asking their son/daughter*
5	*Via their peers asking them to give permission for me to contact them*
6	*'Ran into them' whilst shopping or at school events, and asked them during normal conversation- 2 subsequently declined*
2	*Made unsolicited contact with me having heard from their friends what I was doing*
1	*Mutual friend asked if I could contact them by phone*
1	*Whilst visiting the school was asked by another teacher if they would talk to me*
1	*I phoned direct having been given phone number by their peer with their prior permission*

Table 5: Methods of contacting ex-pupils for interview

I have discussed the ethical concerns around making contact in section 3.2.

There were two sets of siblings in the sample. Two were brother and sister (Darren and Tracey) and three (Naomi, Mizzie and Ewan) were brother and sisters.

Interviewing

I elicited data primarily by interviewing. There is much advice regarding what type of interview is suitable for which purpose: structured, semi-structured, unstructured, (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Robson, 2002, Mertens and McClaughlin, 2004), and some confusion is created by authors' use of the similar terminology for sometimes different processes. They mostly agree that fairly unstructured, informal interviews are useful in eliciting broad areas which seem relevant to the interviewee which, if necessary, can then be addressed in a more focussed way in later more structured interviews. This would seem to be the logical format in a study where I am concerned that the ex-pupils 'take the lead' or set the agenda within the broad parameter of 'school experience'.

I invited the pupils to interview at the school which they had attended and at which I was still teaching. I had to consider ways of stimulating conversation without asking 'leading' questions. We had a tour of the school which has undergone extensive refurbishment since they had attended and often stopped to talk to teachers they remembered. This was very informal and always enjoyable. I had originally planned to interview ex-pupils in pairs. But in fact for logistical reasons only six were ultimately interviewed as pairs all others were interviewed individually. Participants seemed comfortable with this and it is possible that the presence of another individual may have made them more inhibited.

All initial interviews were carried out at the school in an empty classroom after pupils had gone home. I offered drinks and then explained very precisely what the work was about. I have described in Section 3.2 how I attempted to gain continual informed consent

Interviewing would continue until as advised by Strauss and Corbin:

> '… theoretical saturation takes place.' This simply means (within the limits of available time and money) that the researcher finds that no new data are being unearthed' (Strauss and Corbin 1998 p.292)

To further ensure trustworthiness of data I:

- Designed questions so that they avoided issues of suggestibility, acquiescence etc., and aimed for an uninterrupted narrative, as recommended by Lewis (2004)

- I audio-recorded all interviews
- Transcribed all interviews
- Checked the transcription highlights with interviewees
- Used other methods such as sorting, diamond ranking exercises and drawing.
- Checked and asked further questions to agree emerging concepts with interviewees
- Used a peer as coding checker
- Continually reflected on the analysis

Having adopted a phenomenological approach I was not concerned with objectivity in the scientific-methodological sense but still wanted as 'pure' an account as possible, I did not wish to 'put words in mouths'. Finlay (2008) points out, that with phenomenological research...

> '... The aim is to allow the phenomenon to present itself to us instead of us imposing preconceived ideas on it.
> (Finlay 2008 p.5)

So rather than pursuing a rigid set of questions I always started the conversation with... 'Tell me about before you went to special school.' After that each conversation took its own course as I attempted to elicit the uninterrupted narrative. However I have listed below the prompts that were almost invariably used at some stage in the conversation.

1) *Tell me about before you went to special school.*

2) *Tell me about when you started special school.*

3) *Tell me what you remember about special school.*

4) *Tell me about leaving special school*

5) *Tell me about after leaving special school*

When ex-pupils introduced something I often asked for more information or for clarification, e.g. Nadine introduced several items: the idea that her assessment nursery was 'different' from the special school, the term 'disabled' and her description of 'being around everyone', I asked for clarification of each without introducing any of these terms myself.

Sometimes I asked some fairly closed questions which I felt would take the ex-pupil into an area that would give some insight into their experiences. I appreciate the issues associated with closed questions, i.e. that the researcher is introducing their own agenda, constructs, 'their own pre-conceived ideas' (see Finlay above), however, these disadvantages had to be weighed against the fact that I would be spending a relatively brief time with the ex-pupils and, as exemplified by my conversation with Nadine, such a closed question was often just the 'nudge' that was needed to release another flow of thoughts.

R. Did you have friends in your street?
N. No.
R. No. Why was that?
N. I used to get bullied.
R. Did you?
N. Ye.
R. Tell me a bit about that if you don't mind.
N. Well we used to get bullied. The err we used to went to a special school. 'n they used to take the mick out m' Dad an' that….(indistinguishable)

R. Did you say you got bullied because you came to a special school?
N. Ye. … I found it very difficult 'cos….'cos errm …found it difficult…v being here and people used to take the mick. I used to have to stay in all the time….
(Nadine)

I believe skill and sensitivity is needed on the part of the researcher/interviewer to know when and how to interject in the conversation. There is, though, evidence in the transcripts that this is a skill I still need to perfect. There are examples of my interrupting the ex-pupil unnecessarily and to the possible detriment of the work, and examples of my asking leading questions. However because I transcribed all conversations, I believe, very conscientiously, I know when this happened and can make a judgement about the validity of those particular items.

Interviews varied in length from about thirty minutes to about one hour and, with the ex-pupils' permission, were audio-recorded. An independent reader with experience in this field checked the accuracy of the transcripts for all available audio recordings (three).

I transcribed all initial conversations. In the transcription I am referred to as R (researcher) and the ex-pupil is referred to as a coded initial. When referred to in this work the ex-pupil is given a pseudonym to make the work more readable, so that their actual identity is known only to me. The length of silences is indicated by the corresponding number of full stops in the transcript, so that five full stops represents a short break, ten full stops represents a break that is twice as long etc.

I then produced a 'Highlights' sheet which included any data that I thought I might use. I used this sheet to check with the ex-pupils at the second meeting. (see Appendices 19 and 20 for a complete transcript and its corresponding 'Highlights' sheet.) I felt reading through up to thirty sheets of transcript which included all stammering, stumbles, slips etc. would be overly taxing and unkind, especially as many had difficulties with reading. As can be seen from Appendices 19 and 20 the Highlight was half the size of the original transcript. Though the original transcription corresponds exactly with what was said, i.e. it includes dropped aitches, grammatical errors and incorrect words such as Tracey's 'collin' for college, I decided to 'correct' these in the 'Highlights' version which I shared with the ex-pupils. I felt it would be patronising if not offensive to repeat back what they had said verbatim.

The purpose of the second meeting was to:

1) Seek further data if I felt it hadn't been exhausted. If this was the case I again audio-recorded, transcribed and checked back with the ex-pupil. Three ex-pupils were met with on three or more occasions; the rest attended two meetings except for two who declined to attend a meeting after the first.

2) Share the 'Highlights' of their first meeting. I read it through and offered to alter, delete or add anything they wished.

3) Complete a sorting exercise, a diamond ranking exercise and a drawing exercise

With three exceptions I completed all initial meetings before starting the second round. This meant that there was usually a considerable length of time, sometimes around a year, between the two meetings. The venue for these second and subsequent meetings varied. Some were again held at the school they had attended, some in my own home and one in the home of the ex-pupil with his foster parents' permission.

Sorting exercises

I selected comments, words or phrases, which the ex-pupil had used about either mainstream or special school. I typed these individually onto strips of paper. I read these one at a time to the ex-pupils and asked them to put them in an area marked 'special' or an area marked 'mainstream' depending on where they thought they belonged. This exercise served as a check of whether their views were consistent over time (see Appendix 21 for a list of phrases taken from the transcript shown in Appendix 19).

Diamond ranking

I used the same words and phrases which the ex-pupils had sorted (see above). I took one randomly and placed it on the table in front of them. I then read and gave them the next randomly chosen one and asked them to put it above the first if it was more important, at the side of the other if it was of equal importance and below if it was of less importance. This was repeated with each until there were none left. This usually resulted in a more or less 'diamond' shaped pattern of words on the table. Sometimes I photographed the diamond shape or I numbered the slips of paper appropriately.

This was intended to demonstrate how important or relevant each of the words or phrases was to the ex-pupil who had used them. This both served as a check on what they had said at the first meeting but also sometimes extended the data due to the ensuing discussion.

Drawings

Finally ex-pupils were asked to either draw or write a list of words on three separate A3 sheets of paper according to the heading on the paper. One was headed 'mainstream school', one was headed 'special school' and one was headed 'the school that everyone could go to and be happy', I read these headings and in the latter case emphasised the 'everyone'. Thirteen ex-pupils chose to write words and six to do drawings. Ex-pupils who chose to write words were asked if they would like to write them themselves or for me to write them, one asked me to write their words, which I did. I left them alone to complete this exercise. When they said they had finished I talked to them about their drawings or words and transcribed on the sheets what they, (and I), said.

Sharing with participants

All participants were invited to a final meeting which served as a sharing, discussion time and thank you party. Each participant received an appropriate copy of the work (see Appendix 22). We talked through this summary as a group. During the discussion I asked for feedback about:

- The findings- any comments were noted by me
- The process of the research, how could I have done the work better
- What they would like to see happen next
- Anything else they wished to raise

Refreshments were available before and after the discussion and each participant received an individual 'thank you' letter from me.

Analyses

Transcripts were analysed with the aid of Nvivo software. The original transcripts were coded. Information gained from sorting and ranking exercises was checked against the appropriate original transcript for whether they supported what had originally been said. Notes were made of any discrepancies and I reflected on what implications this had for the data. (See discussion of this in Chapter 4). Any extra information coming from the diamond ranking exercise was also coded. I described drawings and copied notes made during the follow up discussion and coded these.

The initial coding was completely open in that I tried to see what meanings emerged from the conversations and other methods, as opposed to imposing my own themes on the data. However I do not believe this total neutrality can be achieved, especially by a professional from within the field, but the researcher can be aware of and expose their prior experiences in the area and consider how those experiences may impact to form prejudices. Having undertaken such an exposition it is then for others to judge

whether the reliability of the work has been adversely affected. I have therefore written a brief history of my encounters with disability and my positioning within the field as it was early on in this work. I have updated it as it has evolved. It is included as Appendix 23

Having identified themes in the initial coding I revisited the data many, many times to recode according to these themes. In this way themes were grounded in the original data. I also coded the data according to some of my own preconceived themes. I had imposed these themes into the original conversation and so could not claim that they were truly grounded in the ex-pupils' experiences, e.g. When talking with Terry I introduced the idea of being ashamed or stigma:

R. Have you ever been ashamed, that's a word we use sometimes isn't it, to tell anybody that you came to T (special) school?
T: No I…
R: No you're OK with it.
T: I'm OK with it.
(Terry)

I had to be vigilant for examples of this and they are discussed in Chapter 4.

I began to feel that social identity theory may enhance the understanding of the work and so I coded for evidence which could be understood within this framework. I will discuss these results and findings in Chapter 4.

Finally, and to be sure the data was completely exhausted, I recoded all the transcripts according to Hycner's guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data (Hycner 1985). This was a manual method which I slightly adapted. There were four stages to the coding.

1. I delineated all units of meaning directly from the transcript. '...a very rigorous process of going over every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph in order to elicit the participant's meaning.' (Hycner 1985 p 282)

2. Units of meaning relevant to the research were then separated out

3. The data from stage 2 was perused to cluster common units of relevant meaning under an appropriate code name.

4. The themes of the clusters of common units of meaning were identified. (Hycner 1985 p 290)

See Appendix 24 for a sample of this coding, according to Hycner's method, of the transcript of one ex-pupil.

Reliability checks

An independent reader with experience in this field randomly selected three transcripts to first code freely with only the title of the work to guide them. The coding headings of the independent worker were similar to those in this work (see Table 6), especially so since they are based on only three transcripts (Darren, Kirk, Maria). The independent reader also checked the correspondence between all available audio recordings (three) and their typed transcripts (Darren, Naomi, Terry,).

There were three insignificant single word errors and five single letter typing errors in the approximately nineteen thousand words of these three transcripts.

Finally the same three transcripts were coded by the independent reader according to the categories used in this work. The independent reader's coding was then compared with the document produced at stage three of the manual coding (see Chapter 3.4). All text that was coded similarly in the two documents was highlighted on the original (stage three) document and this was then expressed as a proportion of the whole text on the document such that exact correspondence between the two documents would be expressed as 1 (See Appendix 25 for sample-Darren). The results were:

Darren 0.5
Naomi 0.2
Terry 0.3

I could describe these results as disappointing, but the purpose of research of this type is not to achieve some accuracy regards correspondence with an independent 'truth' that exists somewhere out there separate from the respondents. Rather its purpose is to explore and co-construct meaning with them. There are many meanings that could have been constructed from this data and they are not mutually exclusive, the 'discrepancies' that emerged in this exercise are an illustration of that.

However a close study of the discrepancies between the two documents reveals that they were almost entirely due to a lack of consensus as to what the code headings meant. In seeking to be intellectually honest I had merely given a written copy of the

code headings to the independent reader and in retrospect I realise that not enough time had been spent discussing the meanings behind the headings I had used. Also my

Author's coding headings	Independent reader's headings
Mainstream education Had experience of mainstream education Mainstream as OK Learning in mainstream school Exams Freedom Behaviour in mainstream	**Attitudes to mainstream** Concerns about school work: Need for individual attention Concerns about other aspects: Size/number of pupils, spread, feeling excluded, more difficult social relationships
Special education The curriculum: Learning in special school Preference for practical curriculum in special school Extra-curricular activities/Visits Support with learning in special school Nurturing nature of special school Staff in special school Fun Scale: size of classes, classrooms, physical distance Facilities in special school Naughtiness in special school Affection for special school Freedom/less freedom in special school	**Memories of special school** Subjects: practical subjects Responses to subjects: enjoyment, useful, appropriate level, fun, increased confidence, interesting Other aspects: Friendships easier, harder outside school, discipline Events: trips, holidays, Christmas play
Identity and Learning difficulties Learning difficulties Hierarchy of sp needs Not identifying with having learning difficulties/Minimising relative severity of own LD Keep special schools open **for others** Locus of control/Agency Preservation of identity/Putting down pupils in mainstream	**Reasons for attending special school** Disclosed to others or not Cognitive difficulties/Behavioural difficulties Own understanding: more help, feeling included
Inclusion Inclusion Belonging/Not in the group/Pushed away Dilemma or not?/ Loved sp. sch. but would have liked to go to mainstream/ or not Friendships only from special school /Mixed No embarrassment/embarrassment at admitting going to special school/Stigma Family support for placement in sp. sch. Effect of special school on rest of life	**Feelings about attending special school** Missed opportunities: mainstream preferred, being recognised in own community, other subjects Acceptance
Structure and Agency Confidence Self-esteem	**Later consequences** Social relationships: Lost contact with friends, lack of shared experience, lack of shared language Opinions on future of special schools: continue/expand

Table 6: A comparison of author's and independent reader's code headings based on three randomly selected transcripts

code headings were the result of many, many hours of perusing the documents which is beyond what can be expected of any independent reader. Most importantly I did not feel that the independent reader's codings revealed any items that I had missed or which should have been included in the study but weren't.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSION

As an introduction and reminder, before presenting the results of each method I have very briefly summarised each method and its purpose. In the case of the sorting, diamond ranking and drawing/word list exercises I have then presented the results of the exercises immediately after each summary. However I will **discuss** those results in the appropriate place and at the same time as discussing the results emerging from the interviews.

4.1. Semi-structured interview: a reminder

This was the main data gathering tool. The conversations were transcribed, highlighted (i.e. all salient words, phrases and sentences were selected) and the document containing the highlights was used for respondent checking. Any extra data generated at the respondent checking session were transcribed. The transcripts were coded several times with the support of Nvivo software and subsequently by following Hycner's guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data (Hycner 1985). This generated thirty-four themes which were then sorted under five meta-themes.

4.2. Sorting exercise: A reminder and results

The purpose of this exercise was to check the reliability of the data, i.e. that what the respondents said they believed was consistent. The outcomes of the sorting exercise were checked against their original conversation transcript and inconsistencies, e.g. if a respondent had said they felt that there was a bond between teachers and pupils in the special school but then went on to sort 'bond between teachers and pupils' under

mainstream school this would be recorded as an inconsistency. Because the number of items to be sorted varied with each respondent a consistency score, i.e. the number of items that were sorted consistently/the total number of items sorted was given and this was converted to a percentage, 100% being totally consistent. The results are shown in Table 7.

Seventeen ex-pupils completed the sorting exercise. Two declined the invitation to the follow up interviews which was when the sorting exercise was completed and one found the exercise too difficult.

Sometimes an ex pupil was unsure where to place an item, this was therefore not included in the consistency score but is recorded as an unplaced item in the final column of Table 7

These results show that the ex-pupils were highly consistent with their responses. Thirteen of the seventeen respondents achieved 100% consistency with the items they sorted. Two were inconsistent when sorting one item and one was inconsistent with two items, though he placed consistently forty of his forty two items.

Although this sorting of 'highlighted' items exercise was completed to check for consistency, it did afford an early and quick rough guide as to the topics about which the ex-pupils were talking. To facilitate this, each of the statements sorted under 'special school' and 'mainstream school' were clustered into similar themes that had emerged from the data. (See Appendix 26 for the complete list of sorted items and the themes into which they were clustered).

Results of sorting exercise

Name of ex-pupil	Consistency score (Number of items sorted consistently / total number of items sorted)	Consistency percentage	Unplaced items (Number of items the ex-pupil felt unable to sort)
Amy	-	-	-
	15/15	100%	1
Bella	12/13	92%	0
Brian	6/6	100%	6
Daniel	9/9	100%	4
Darren	11/11	100%	0
David	19/20	95%	6
Diane	15/15	100%	1
Ewan	Exercise not completed	-	-
Hannah	Exercise not completed	-	-
Kirk	9/9	100%	0
Maria	6/6	100%	2
Mizzie	18/19	95%	0
Nadine	14/14	100%	0
Naomi	10/10	100%	1
Simon	10/10	100%	3
Terry	13/13	100%	4
Tim	13/13	100%	2
Tony	40/42	95%	0
Tracey	11/11	100%	0

Table 7: Respondent consistency: Comparing the sorting exercise with what had been said during the interview (N=17)

Table 8 shows what the themes were, to which educational setting they were attributed and how many times they had occurred in all the sorting exercises.

Special school	Number	Mainstream school	Number

	of times mentioned		of times mentioned
Getting appropriate help	20	*Bullying*	19
Caring	15	*Alienation*	10
Being different	14	*Unhappiness*	10
Acceptance	13	*Difficult work*	10
Learning	9	The school for me	6
Happiness	7	Normal	5
Confidence	7	Cleverer pupils	4
The best school for me	5	*Scale*	3
Relationships with staff	3	Misc.	8
Knowledgeable teachers	3		
Scale	3		
Misc.	12		

Table 8: Themes emerging from highlight sorting exercise indicating numbers of times mentioned. Themes in italics indicate that the theme is a negative aspect of that type of educational provision

For each educational setting those themes which occurred ten or more times were then selected and sorted as to whether they were considered by the ex-pupil to be positive or negative aspects of those establishments (see Table 9).

Special school		Mainstream school	
Positives	Negatives	Positives	Negatives
Getting appropriate help (20) Caring (15) Acceptance (13)	Being different (14)	-	Bullying (19) Difficult work (10) Unhappiness (10) Alienation (10)

Table 9: Summary of positive and negative themes emerging from highlight sorting exercise

These themes will be discussed in detail below.

4.3. Diamond ranking: a reminder and results

The purpose of this method was to extend data via discussion with the individual ex-pupils during completion of the exercise, and to discover what aspects of their schooling were of prime importance to the ex-pupils. The method also presented another opportunity for me to check for consistency between what the ex-pupil had been saying during interview and how they were ranking items. The lists of ranked items were compared with the interview transcript of each ex-pupil to check for inconsistencies.

4.3.1 Results of diamond ranking exercise

The ranked lists were entirely consistent with interview data, though I will discuss below what I now believe to be the limitations of using this method in this context. The items prioritised as first by ex-pupils, i.e. of most importance to them, were clustered into themes which emerged from the data. Themes that had items within them prioritised as first by at least three ex-pupils were: emotional wellbeing, support for learning and learning (see Table 10). It was noted whether each item was sorted by the ex-pupil under mainstream or special school (The key below applies throughout this section).

Key:
Blue = sorted for special
Red = sorted for mainstream
Red *= undecided, but when encouraged to choose, chose to sort in special*
Blue *= undecided, but when encouraged to choose, chose to sort with mainstream*
Black *= undecided*

Themes encapsulating items ranked first	Items categorised within those themes
Emotional wellbeing (7 items)	Happy Feeling happy Feeling happy More friends Friendly Nice pupils *Being accepted*
Support for learning (5 items)	Having more attention Teachers having time to sit with you More help Helpful teachers Having work that is the right level for you
Learning (4 items)	Learning Improving learning Doing lots of different lessons Being able to read and write

Table 10: Items prioritised as first by at least three ex-pupils collected into themes and showing with which educational setting the ex-pupil associated them

Other items prioritised as first by one or two ex-pupils were:

A good job at the end of it
Getting qualifications
Passing exams
Independence
Being more confident
Smarter (brain-wise)
The real world
Good school
Sports
Being proud of the school you went to

When items prioritised as first **and second** were collected into themes five themes emerged that had items within them prioritised as first or second by at least three ex-pupils, they were: emotional wellbeing, support for learning, learning, qualifications and freedom (see table 11)

Themes encapsulating items ranked first and second	**Items categorised within those themes**
Emotional wellbeing (24 items)	Being accepted Being accepted Not feeling left out Feeling part of the group Other kids understanding you *Being normal* Feeling 100% normal Being treated like a family Family feeling Being left out More friends Friendly Happy Being happy Feeling happy Happy Feeling happy Being safe Being in a caring environment Being looked after *Not being bullied* Nice pupils Pupils being nice Being laughed at
Support for learning (10 items)	Bigger classes- more pupils Teachers that understand you More help from teachers Teachers able to spend time with you Having more attention More help More help Helpful teachers Teachers having time to sit with you Help from teachers
Learning (8 items)	Improving learning Learning Learning More learning Doing better Improving learning Being able to read and write Being able to speak properly
Qualifications (5items)	Passing exams A good job at the end of it Getting qualifications Doing tests and exams *Exams*
Freedom (3 items)	Being able to do what you want at break times Independence Freedom

Table 11: Items prioritised as first or second by at least three ex-pupils collected into themes and showing with which educational setting the ex-pupil associated them

Other items prioritised as first or second by one or two ex-pupils were:

Being more confident
Being confident
Having work that is the right level for you
Doing lots of different lessons
The school where I'd cope
Smarter (brain-wise says Naomi)
Nice teachers
People not knowing about special schools
Good school
Good school
Good education
Sports
Being proud of the school you went to
Interesting things to do
The real world

4.4. Drawings/Word lists: a reminder and results

The purpose of completing drawings or word lists about each of three educational settings, special, mainstream and inclusive, was to extend data via an alternative method, thus possibly revealing more than was forthcoming from interview alone, and to check reliability i.e. that what they said they believed during interview was consistent over time. Though, for unavoidable reasons of expediency, four ex-pupils completed their drawings or word lists at the same meeting as their initial interview was held, the time lapses between initial interview and completion of this exercise for the other fifteen, (one did not complete this exercise), ranged between seven and twenty-three months (See Table 12 for time lapse between interview and drawings/word lists being completed for each ex-pupil).

Ex-pupil	Time lapse between initial interview and drawing/word list exercise
Amy	16 months
Barry	Completed at same meeting as initial interview
Bella	10 months
Brian	9 months
Daniel	20 months
Darren	21 months
David	7 months
Diane	10 months
Ewan	Exercise not completed
Hannah	Completed at same meeting as initial interview
Kirk	8 months
Maria	14 months
Mizzie	16 months
Nadine	23 months
Naomi	Completed at same meeting as initial interview
Simon	9 months
Terry	9 months
Tim	Completed at same meeting as initial interview
Tony	18 months
Tracey	21 months

Table 12: Time lapse between initial interview and completion of drawing/word list exercise

The drawings or word lists and any annotations added by the author whilst discussing the drawings/wordlists with the ex-pupils were coded and emerging themes were identified for each educational setting: a hypothetical special school, a hypothetical mainstream school and a hypothetical inclusive school. How many ex-pupils had mentioned items within each theme was noted (See tables 13, 14 and 15 respectively).

4.4.1 Results of Drawing/Word list exercise

Theme	How many ex-pupils referred to this theme
Emotional wellbeing	7
Help in the classroom	7
Relationships	7
Staff	7
Activities	6
Care/Control	5
Appropriate work	4
Belonging	4
Learning	4
Safety/Security	4
Bullying	3
Fun	3
Visits	3
Others: behaviour, scale, effect on life after school, facilities, inclusion, exclusion, self-esteem	Each referred to by 2 or less

Table 13: Themes emerging from ex-pupils' drawings and word lists about a hypothetical **special school** and how many ex-pupils referred to items within each theme (n=19)

Theme	How many ex-pupils referred to this theme
Appropriate work	7
Bullying	6
Behaviour	6
Scale	6
Staff	5
Help in class	5
Activities	4
Facilities	3
Emotional wellbeing	3
Others: learning, exams, friendship, fun, safety	Each referred to by 2 or less

Table 14: Themes emerging from ex-pupils' drawings and word lists about a hypothetical **mainstream school** and how many ex-pupils referred to items within each theme (n=19)

Theme	How many ex-pupils referred to this theme
Inclusion	7
Bullying	7
Facilities	7
Emotional wellbeing	6
Help in the classroom	6
Appropriate work	6
Staff	5
Scale	4
Safety/security	3
Activities	3
Others: Surroundings, Freedom, Visits, friendships, Understanding LDs, Qualifications, Learning	Each referred to by 2 or less

Table 15: Themes emerging from ex-pupils' drawings and word lists about a hypothetical **inclusive school** and how many ex-pupils referred to items within each theme (n=19)

These themes will be discussed in detail below.

4.5.Semi-structured interviews and other methods: findings

I attempted to keep the **initial** codings of transcripts grounded in the data. Subsequently I revisited the transcripts to impose codes that I had generated. I will describe those findings after detailed discussion of the initial codings.

The initial codings were clustered into thirty-four themes and ultimately, under five meta-themes:

Below (See Table 16) is a list of the thirty-four themes as I originally sorted them before in depth analysis began. They therefore demonstrate how the themes emerged from the data. The themes could have been sorted in many ways and I claim no superior value for the way I chose. I feel there is some logic to my order of

presentation in as much as mainstream education always preceded special education for the majority of the ex-pupils who experienced mainstream education. The subsequent three meta-themes seemed to encapsulate all that the ex-pupils were otherwise saying and present an opportunity to look in more depth at the issues about which the ex-pupils were talking.

This sorting of initial codings was completed before the in-depth analysis which I describe below. The in-depth analysis revealed how themes interconnected and therefore after presenting the first two meta-themes, which describe the context, I do not adhere to presenting the themes in the order listed here. It did not prove to be the logical order. I address the findings from meta-themes 3, 4 and 5 under the single heading 'Identity and Learning difficulties'.

In the case of the first two meta-themes, where there seems to be a choice I have chosen to present a theme as a positive aspect of one institution as opposed to a negative aspect of the other, e.g. the theme of 'help in the classroom' is discussed as a positive feature of special schools rather than a negative feature of mainstream schools, except where this seems inappropriate.

Meta-themes	Themes sorted under that meta-theme
Mainstream education	Mainstream as OK Learning in mainstream school Exams Freedom Behaviour in mainstream
Special education	The curriculum: Learning in special school Preference for practical curriculum in special school Extra-curricular activities/Visits Support with learning in special school Nurturing nature of special school Staff in special school Fun Scale Facilities in special school Naughtiness in special school Affection for special school Freedom and special school
Identity and Learning difficulties	Learning difficulties Hierarchy of sp needs Not identifying with having learning difficulties/Minimising relative severity of own LD Keep special schools open for others Locus of control/Agency Preservation of identity/Putting down pupils in mainstream
Inclusion	Inclusion Belonging/Not in the group/Pushed away Dilemma or not? Regret at not attending mainstream/Dilemma Friendships only from special school /Mixed No embarrassment/embarrassment at admitting going to special school/Stigma Family support for placement in special school Effect of special school on rest of life
Structure and Agency	Confidence Self-esteem

Table 16: Initial coding of interview data showing clustering of themes into meta-themes

4.5.1. Mainstream schools

Mainstream is OK.

Talking about their mainstream school experience in Key Stage 1, (and sometimes Key Stage 2), was not a priority for the ex-pupils. Some, like Tracey and Kirk, had little or no recollection of that time in their lives. As a topic of conversation it usually arose as a consequence of my asking them to tell me about before they went to special school. When they expressed an opinion most had no issue with their general experience there, referring to it as OK, all right, fine or good (e.g. Diane, Ewan and Hannah).

In common with most of the ex-pupils David had also enjoyed his mainstream primary schooling but was more cautious about the prospect of attending mainstream secondary school:

R: So … would you say that you enjoyed your primary school as we call it, the one you were at until you were eleven?
D: I enjoyed it ye…
R: You did enjoy it?
D: …for the… when I was younger…
R: And you were happy there?
D: Ye I was quite happy but I didn't… wasn't sure about ... ...BE or ND (local mainstream secondary schools)…
(David)

Only Barry and Tim had such strong negative feelings about their primary school:

B: Before I come 'ere? I went to R Junior….in X (local town)……nasty school that was.
T: Still is.
(Barry and Tim)

Learning in mainstream school

When ex-pupils talked about learning in mainstream schools however they were more disparaging. They often commented that they had learnt little if anything

S: ... … before I came to T. (special school) I was errr not learning anything at all. Then I came to T. (special) school and it changed my life.
(Simon)

Difficulties with work in mainstream school

Most of the ex-pupils raised the issue of how difficult or inappropriate the work would be for them in a mainstream school. Interestingly they were not saying that the work **had been** too hard for them but that it **would be** too hard for them had they attended secondary mainstream school.

R: ... ... if you'd gone to secondary school, the big secondary school… and not come to a special school? How would it have been different?
B: Errm……. 'cos if I went to …… the other school it would be probably be hard. I wouldn't get… wouldn't get… conc…. Concentrate 'n
(Bella)

Barry and Tim were in agreement that they would drop out of mainstream secondary school because work would be too hard for them there:

B: I'd be a dropout.
T: Ye.
R: You'd be a dropout?
B: Ye.
R: Why's that?
B: 'Cos it'd be too hard for me to d... pick up...
T: Wouldn't understand the work would ya?
B: No.
(Barry and Tim)

Simon, Kirk and Amy agreed that the work would be 'harder' in mainstream schools. The harder work was the first thing Daniel thought of when asked how mainstream schools were different from special schools, not only that the work was harder but that they did the work in 'harder ways'.

Hannah agreed with Daniel that it was something to do with 'the way they do things', she had described the special school as 'knowledgeable' and 'doing things in an easier way' I asked her what she meant by 'knowledgeable':

H: 'Cos it's like you're in GCSE level. [*Right.]* 'Cos that's what I was sc… 'cos I didn't do 'em 'n that, I don't think I would have been able… I would have got ungraded or summat like that (smiling). [*Right]* But being here (special school) I got more knowledge of… you did it easier 'n that 'n I got to know more 'nd…[*Right.]* …working at it I did get better.
(Hannah)

Nadine had similar concerns to Hannah about coping with GCSEs. Talking of mainstream school she said:

N. ……Don't…….Maybe the subjects that we do here (special school) like they're doing there, maybe they could be harder……..'cos they're bound to be aren't they 'cos like do GCSEs and stuff and we don't do GCSEs (indistinguishable) like I wouldn't be able to cope.
(Nadine)

The ex-pupils' drawings/word lists describing typical mainstream schools reiterated this perception that work would be less accessible in mainstream school. The work would be harder, there would be too many subjects, there would be more pressure to complete work and stricter deadlines to be met, they wouldn't cope with the work and if you didn't do your work you would be kept in after school and given lots of homework (Collected ex-pupils' drawings/word lists).

Exams in Mainstream school

Like Nadine and Hannah above, some ex-pupils associated exams with mainstream schools. Though most of them had done exams at the special school they were often conscious that these had a different currency from GCSEs. Kirk spoke of not having a common language around exam levels achieved when discussing them with his colleagues who had attended mainstream schools. He didn't understand their As, Bs, Cs etc and they didn't understand his Distinctions, Merits and Passes, he couldn't compare them 'it felt a bit different'

Barry and Tim also remarked that the exams were different in special school.

For Nadine the fact that the special school hadn't provided an opportunity to do GCSEs when she attended was the source of a dilemma. She felt that she needed GCSEs to get a good job but felt she wouldn't be able to cope with doing GCSEs but wished she'd gone to mainstream secondary because that's where they do GCSEs. She comments movingly:

N: I feel bad because I came to a special school, I would have liked to have gone to a normal school, 'cos I feel you can't.. you can't get the qualifications what they've got, you can't get the jobs what you want to do, 'cos which is true 'cos we're a bit slower than them people, so therefore we can't….'cos if we haven't done GCSEs or anything then basically we can't get a… a good job like that. There has to be something to suit us and that we're able to do. So .. it does affect… even though I do, I really loved coming to this school
(Nadine)

Nadine had referred to mainstream school as 'normal' and Mizzie identified doing exams as part of being 'normal:

R: …what do you mean by 'normal'?
M: …. It probably smart probably got about two GSEs …and everything I suppose.
(Mizzie)

Freedom in mainstream school

Five of the male ex-pupils commented on their feeling that mainstream schools or college offered more 'freedom' to their pupils.

Brian had said that you could get to do what you want in mainstream schools:

R: What sorts of things are you thinking about that you could get to do what you want in mainstream?
B: Errr like errr…you …you …you wouldn't not like …….Well you're not allowed to go out of the premises.

… …

R: Would you have liked to have been able to go out…off the premises?
B: …Ye like just to go…like pop down to the shop.
(Brian)

Brian goes on to contrast the freedom of college with the restrictions of special school:

R: Is there anything else here (special school) that you would have liked… wished was different?
B: ……..errrr……..……be a……[Sorry]....Err be able to do what you…well ……..what you want.
R: *When?*
B: Like… like err if….like at college……..

… …

R: Right and you found that you couldn't do what you wanted here (special school) at break times?
B: Mmm it's a bit….it's a bit restricted.
(Brian)

On the same theme Tony said when talking of special school:

T: ...in later life I felt I could 'a' needed a bit more freedom. 'Cos I didn't feel like I could go out on me own to places, but I've learnt now to go to places on me own.
(Tony)

Tony's drawing of special school (see Drawing 1) is very revealing on this topic. He drew a fence around the special school and in discussion afterwards told me he had drawn...

'...the school being locked up from the outside, not having the freedom to go to the shop if you wanted to. It wasn't actually locked but it felt like it,'
(Tony)

He drew another ring enclosing another school building and children playing. He said it's...

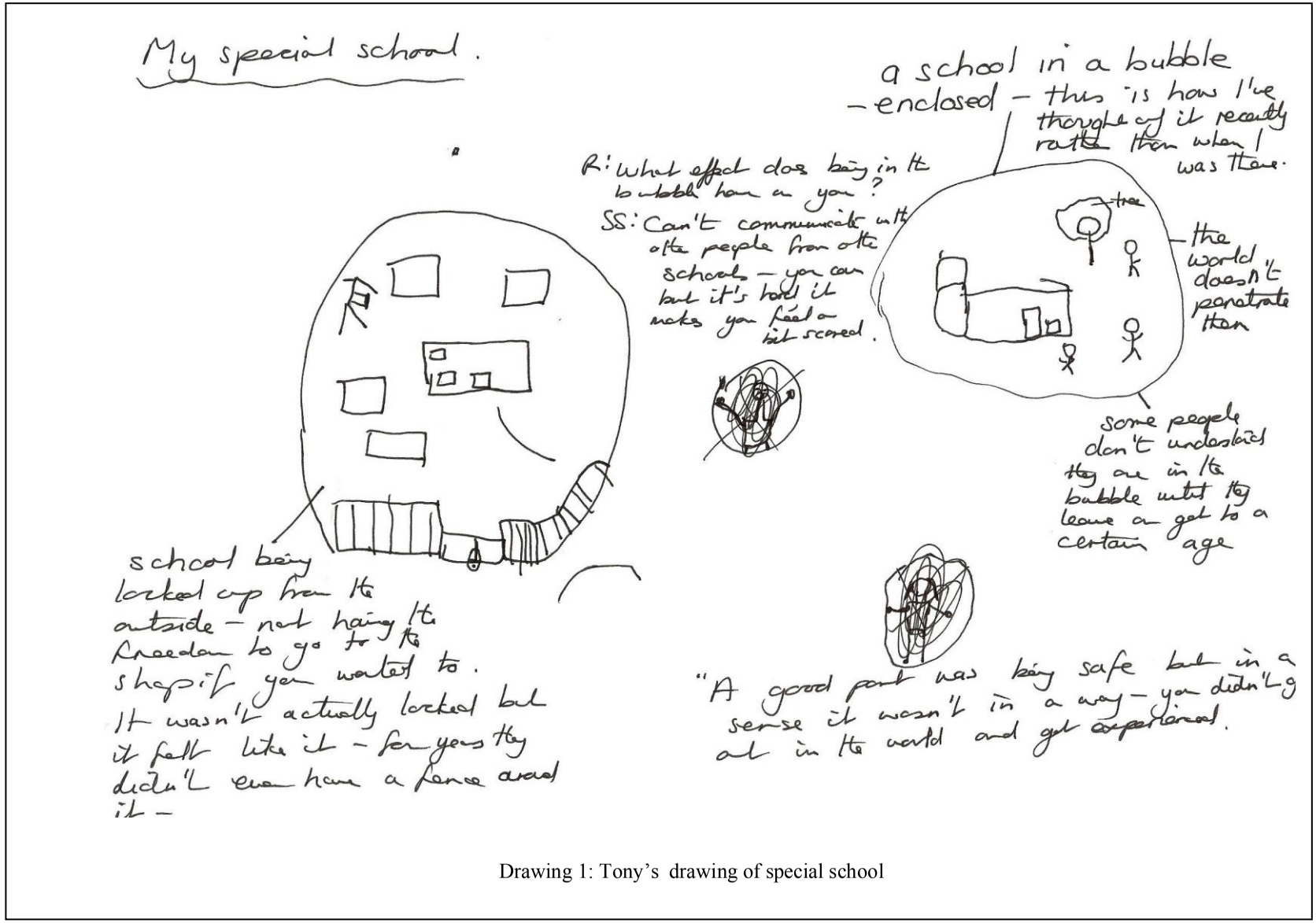
'...a school in a bubble, enclosed, this is how I've thought of it recently rather than when I was there. The world doesn't penetrate them....(you) can't communicate with other people from other schools, you can but it's hard, it makes you feel a bit scared. Some people don't understand they are in the bubble until they leave or get to a certain age.'
(Tony)

Tony, David and Terry all raised the issue of special school transport. The ex-pupils had all been taxied to and from school. They felt that it would have been better, at

least in their senior years, to allow them to walk or to use public transport. This, they thought, would have allowed them to walk with friends from their neighbourhood and been a better preparation for college life.

In contrast Bella was more concerned with safety than freedom, and with the lack of what she saw as measures to keep her safe in mainstream school. Of special school she said:

B: ……it was safe
R: ... ...What were you safe from…….In special school?
B: … Safe errm……
R: Safe from…
B: From…….Going like outside 'n …….
R: Outside where?
B: Outside by the gates 'n……
R: Right. What might happen to you by the gates then?
B: You get runned over.
R: You got run over?



Drawing 1: Tony's drawing of special school

B: Ye.
R: Right. And if you'd gone to secondary school, would you have felt safe in a secondary school?
B: No.
R: No. What might… do you think might have happened to you in a secondary school?
B: Ermm……'cos there's no gates by… in a sec…secs….Errm sec... (secondary school)
(Bella)

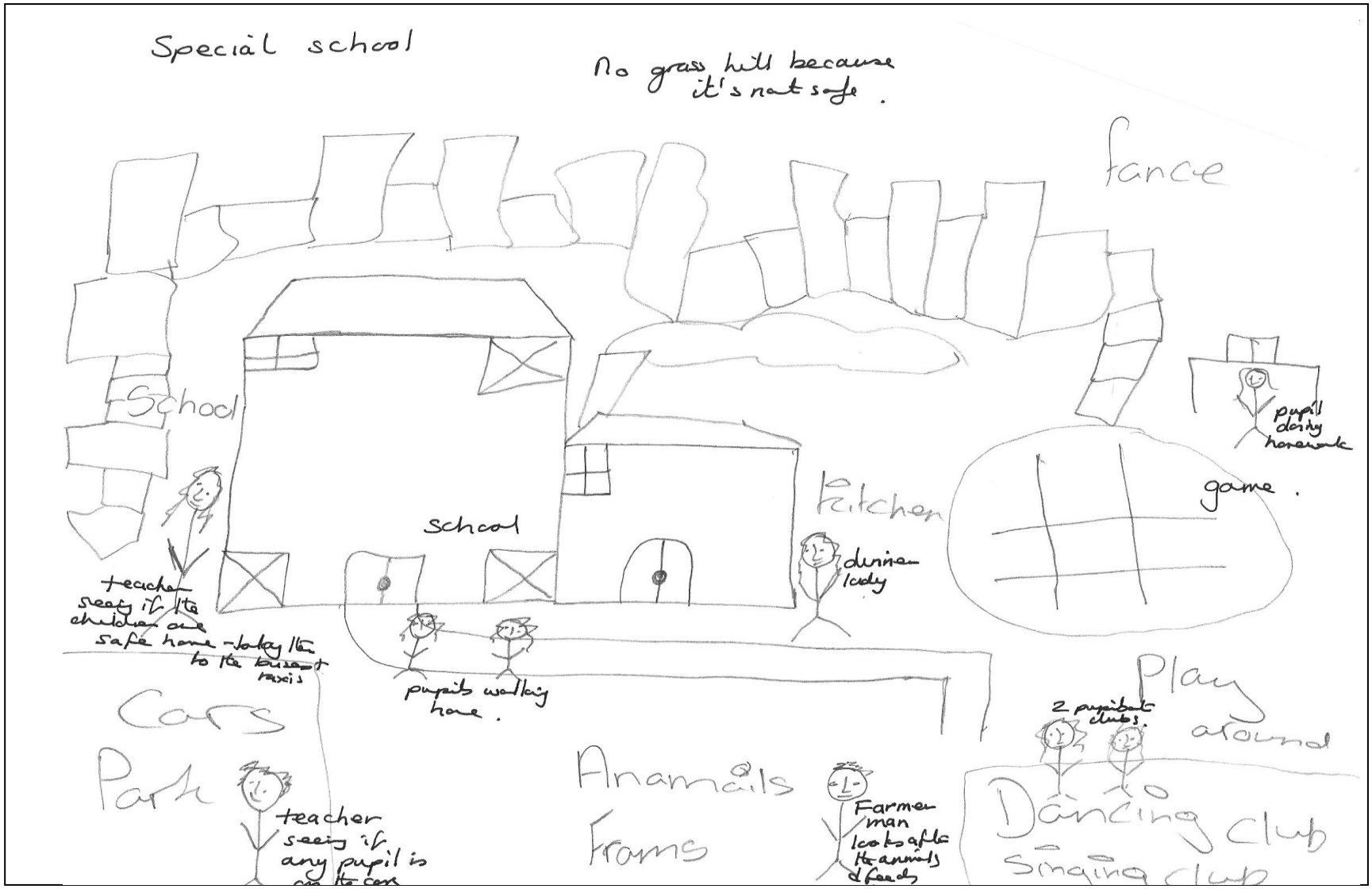
Safety was a big concern of Bella's. On her drawing of a special school she drew an intricate fence, around the school. She drew a teacher whom she told me was, '... seeing if the children are safe home.' She also told me there was no grass hill behind the school because '...it's not safe.' On her drawing of a mainstream school there was no fence but there was a grassy hill which she told me was '...for people to play on.' (See Bella's drawings 2 and 3).

Behaviour in mainstream school

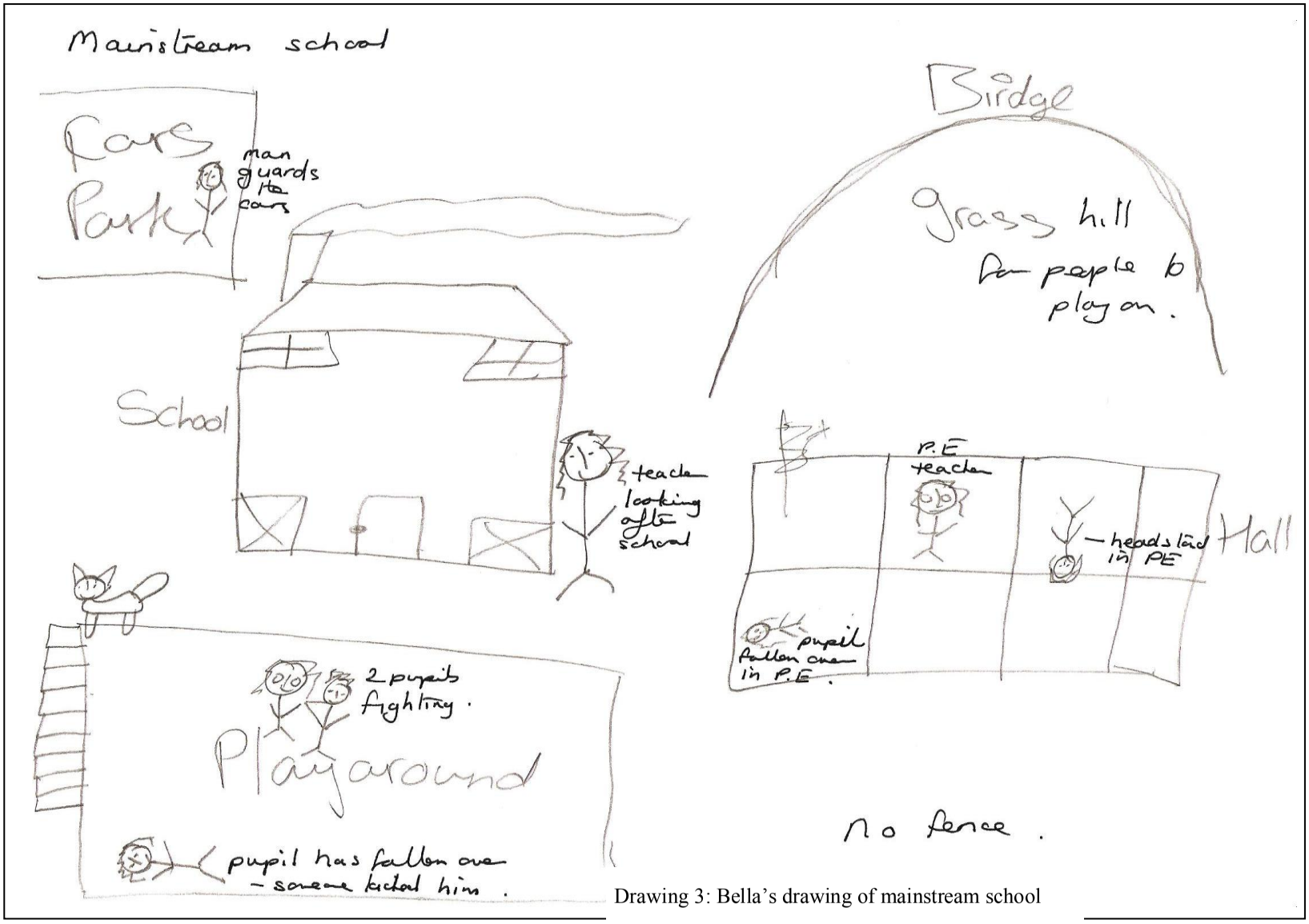
Though there were some references to bullying in mainstream primary schools, the behaviour of pupils within school, that had been experienced by the ex-pupils first hand, was not often referred to.

Simon mentioned 'bossy pupils':

S: ... …the pupils were nice but they were always bossy…..
…. ...
R: They were bossy, the other pupils were bossy?
S: Ye.
R: Right. Ho… how do you mean, by bossy?
S: Errr… like arguing, telling people to get out the way 'n that……
(Simon)



Drawing 2: Bella's drawing of special school



Drawing 3: Bella's drawing of mainstream school

Several ex-pupils reported instances of bullying in mainstream primary school, name calling or mocking because they were 'slower' than other pupils; some implied that this had been at least a contributory factor in their transfer to special school.

D: Errm…They was being nasty to me.
R: Why was that?
D: (indistinguishable) …'cos I was doing stuff like this for sports day at junior school and I was last… come last. And I saw someone laughing, they was laughing an' I thought…… upset.
R: You got upset did you? Did that happen any… any other time did you get laughed at?
D: Before lessons.
R: Before lessons? Wh… tell me about that.
D: I can remember (indistinguishable) someone was being nasty and I told this teacher and she said something about, 'I think it's leavin' to a different school.'
(Diane)

A: Errrm they used to bully me a lot…the boys.
R: In what way? What did they do?
A: Errm 'cos I wasn't like as quick as them like as fast as they are at writing and stuff……. and they used to bully me.
R: How did they bully you?
A: Errrm…they used to errr kick the football at me and throw ice at me and everything …n

… …

R: Did that happen……how often did that happen?
A: Errrm….I think it only happened once.[*Right]* But they…they tripped over my ankle 'cos I wasn't quick enough to get out of the way 'n that's how my Mum suggested this place coming here.
(Amy)

Notice that Amy initially says the mainstream boys bullied her 'a lot' and then describes an incident, when asked how often it happened however she says, '….I think it only happened once.' She may have been referring though to this particular incident only happening once.

Tracey also complained of having been bullied for being 'slower' and Daniel thought he was bullied for similar reasons.

Bella reported that she had experienced some bullying in mainstream primary but that she thought this probably happened to everyone at first:

B: Like it was when it was on break times 'n they used to come to you 'n …push you 'n say horrible names to you…
R: Why did the…did they do that to everybody or …or just you?
B: …They did…did it everybody 'n…
R: They did it to everybody?.....OK why…why did they do that to you do you think?
B: Errm……pr…probably don't really know you at first …'n……
(Bella)

Otherwise, actual, personally experienced bullying in mainstream school was relatively rarely referred to, when it was there seemed to be a tendency to belittle the experience:

D: I was falling behind but…I had friends but I didn't get bullied like used to be, it wasn't many… you know 'cos now these days it's people with trainers and mobiles and things like that. When I was younger I didn't get much bullied
(David)

They sometimes denied they had ever been bullied and later revealed that they had been bullied even though it may have been an isolated incident.

R: In mainstream primary school you were never bullied…
H: No.

R: …were you? No. So what makes you think you would get bullied? What gives…where do you get that information from? How do you know that you'd get bullied if…
H: I just had a few… a few that did. But then they stopped it 'cos…
R: …a few?
H: …a few people from the primary…[*Oh right.]* Errm…
R: They bullied while you were there did they?
H: Ye. When I was…when I was younger but err……it got sorted 'cos me Mum actually…'cos I spoke to me Mum, and me Mum said to 'em…errm….The s…the school sorted it out and I didn't have any other problems after that.
(Hannah)

Isolated though the instance of bullying may have been, it was enough to persuade Hannah that she didn't want to risk going to mainstream secondary school.

H: I just didn't want to go up with 'em in case it started again. [*Right.]* So that's why I preferred coming to the school (special school).
R: Right. And do you think it would have started again or not?...If you'd gone to mainstream?
H: Oh I don't know c'…I didn't want to take the risk really…[*Right.]* I wouldn't have enjoyed going there if I'd have had that.
(Hannah)

Others were emphatic that they had never been bullied but they almost invariably knew people who had been and though none of them had direct personal experience of mainstream secondary school the general consensus was that behaviour in mainstream was relatively poor.

B: Sometimes you get bullied, sometimes you won't. At least in a special school you won't get bullied as much. Least you know you're with the same people...
R: Was that ever a problem for you two? Were you ever bullied in mainstream?
B: No, no. (laughs)
… …

*R: Right. You think people get bullied? I don't know 'cos people have talked about being bullied here (*at the special school*) as well. While they were here.*
T: I was never bullied.

R: You weren't bullied. No well you had him by the side of you all the time (all laugh). ……So people do say they were bullied errm……but people do talk about bullying in mainstream as well. I wonder if it's any different actually…
B: No. It's worse
R: …in mainstream or in…it's worse where?
B: It's worser in m… normal schools than special…
R: In mainstream schools. You think so?
B: Ye.
R: You saw that or…
B: Err…
T: I seen my sister go through it so…she went to mainstream …she got bullied quite a bit...
(Barry and Tim)

Mizzie had not experienced bullying herself **inside** mainstream school but again she knew someone who had. However Mizzie and Tony had had very frightening experiences due to encountering pupils **outside** their mainstream school:

R: Some people say that errm if you go to special school you get picked on more because you go to special school, what do you think about that?
M: No I don't think so. No they're wrong I think. No. Errm of course it come out worse for me after school errr but now….(faltering voice) it's OK.
R: So it..it…you had these problems of bullying after school, when you'd left school.
M: Ye'.
R: Do you think if you'd gone to mainstream school you wouldn't have got bullied?
M: Errm I think it would probably have got worse. Lot worse than… I'd probably have been dead actually. But still. [*Really?]* Ye if they know you're struggling they pick on ya. Probably 'd actually been stabbed.... still would've been worse for me. But errr errr …used to be really bad. Got bad… so bad police (indistinguishable) to come.... But errr…
R: So you're sure that wasn't to do with having been to special school?
M: No I thin…No I don't think so, it was probably…(indistinguishable)…what rumours went round…
R: What what, sorry?
M. What rumours....Ye ye a lot of rumours… a lot of 'em started to flow round and…
R: You don't need to tell me if you don't want to …
M: No no I don't mind it….It's all ….Errr (getting upset) …I don't mind…I know I'm criticising X (area where M lives), but it… it's B (local secondary mainstream school) school, a lot of kids (indistinguishable) it's (indistinguishable)… came round….(indistinguishable)…but er we did call the police…..
(Mizzie)

R: ...say you were eleven and somebody said, 'Right you can go to special school or you can go to mainstream school, what would you choose now?

T: ……I would still choose special 'cos being in primary (Tony means mainstream) school and things like that, I might a been bullied and things like that. Might 'a' been people beating me up and things like that.
R: Why do you think that? Why do you think that might have happened?
T: Err … I just see when I go up on the bus past errm ……Oh what's it called the name of the school?……..B (local secondary school), when I go past B there's all the kids on the bus, I've been on one once when they've (actually) smashed the window at the back of the bus and pushed it out. I d……..that scared me a bit. (indistinguishable)… and the crowd of people that scared me a lot……
(Tony)

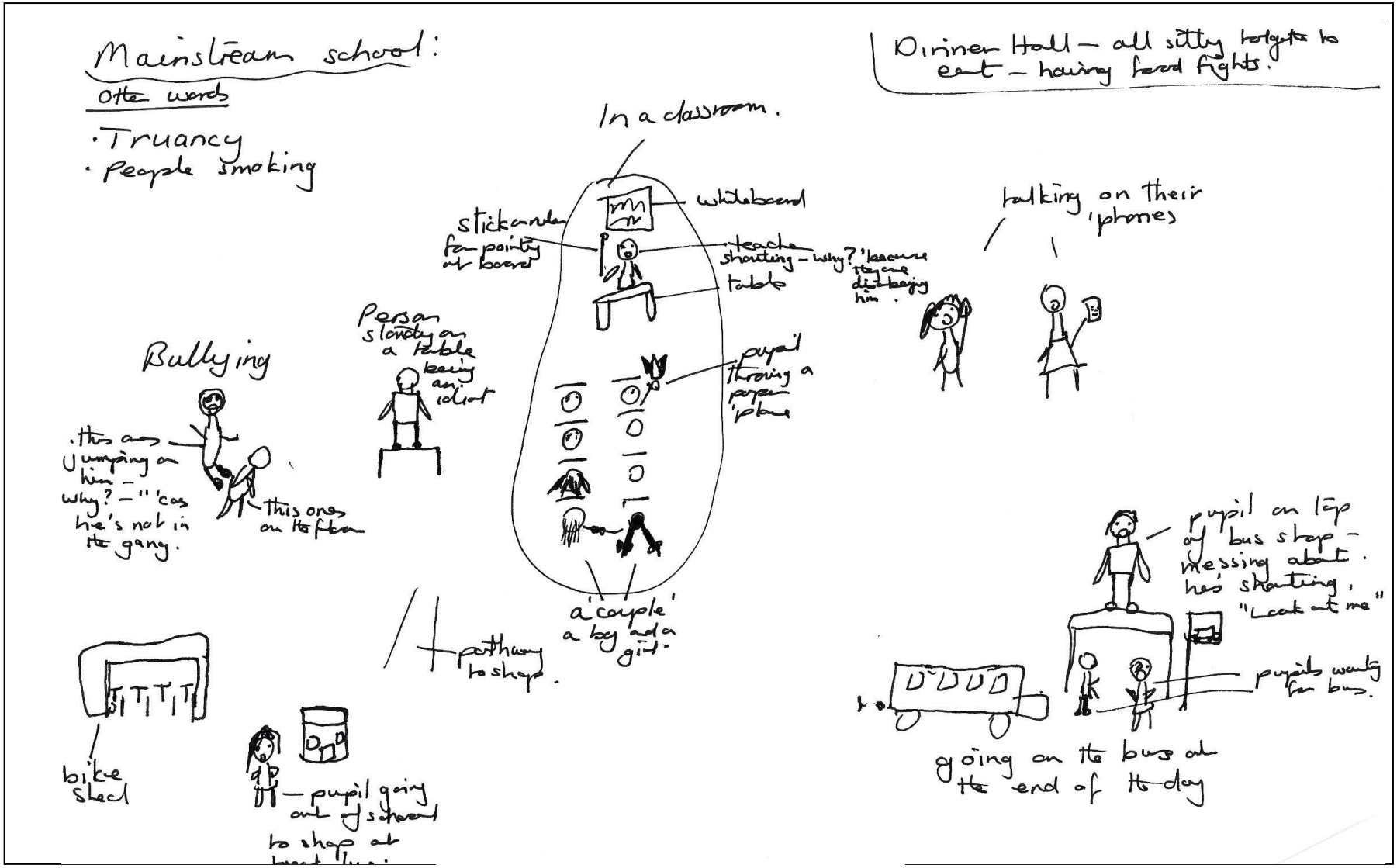
Tony's drawing (see Drawing 4) also illustrated his concerns about behaviour in mainstream schools.

Drawings/word list descriptions of typical mainstream schools were at least as revealing about what the ex-pupils believed about behaviour there as their conversations had been.

David's word list included:

> Lots of fights
> Under age sex
> A lot of drugs
> Smoking
> Things getting stolen
> Skiving off classes
> Killings- people getting really..... knife crime
> (From David's word list to describe a typical mainstream school)

Others drew or listed: fights, noise, throwing things, skiving off, smoking, kicking, general nastiness and mucking around and teachers shouting, telling people off and not being in control. Mizzie drew a fence around her mainstream school and told me it was 'to keep the naughty kids in'.



Drawing 4: Tony's drawing of mainstream school

Summary of the findings within meta-theme: Mainstream schools

The ex-pupils of special school in this study had mostly had considerable experience of primary mainstream education but none of them had any direct experience of secondary mainstream education.

On the whole the feeling was that mainstream primary school had been OK, despite the consensus that they had learnt little or nothing whilst there.

They thought that the work in mainstream secondary school would be too difficult for them. GCSEs formed a focus for this feeling. You needed GCSEs to be 'normal' and to get a good job. They didn't feel they were at that level of achievement and anyway they had no way of understanding their relative level of achievement because the 'language' of the exams they did do was different.

Some felt that mainstream secondary school would be less restrictive than special school.

Some described how they had been bullied in mainstream primary school, mostly because of their 'slowness' but only one, supported by his friend, felt his experience had been so unpleasant as to describe his mainstream primary school as 'nasty'.

In the sorting exercise bullying had been mentioned nineteen times and was always sorted under mainstream schooling. 'Not being bullied' was the only reference to bullying in the items ranked as of first and second priority to the ex-pupils i.e. only one ex-pupil thought it ranked in the first two priorities. So although there were lots of references to bullying it does not seem to have been a prime concern for most individuals in this study.

The ex-pupils described relatively little actual personal experience of bullying or even bad behaviour. Interestingly Tony and Mizzie who told the most harrowing accounts of bullying or experiencing bad behaviour had had only one and two years maximum of mainstream schooling respectively, and their frightening experiences had happened off school premises. David who had said that he 'didn't get much bullied' and had friends in mainstream primary school then went on to include: fights, drugs, sex and knife crime in his word list to describe the typical mainstream school.

In summary the ex-pupils' perspective of mainstream education was that primary mainstream school is OK, but they learnt little there. It was probably a less restrictive environment than special school. There was some bullying there but this was not an overwhelming feature of the ex-pupils' accounts. Secondary mainstream school was a place where the work would be inaccessible, partly because of teaching methods, and pupil behaviour was poor.

Discussion of findings within the meta-theme: Mainstream schools

There seems to be a mismatch between what was actually experienced and some of the ex-pupils' perceptions of mainstream secondary education. Their experience of mainstream secondary school was largely vicarious and accessed, perhaps, via siblings and friends, their parents' accounts of their time in mainstream schools, their own observations of young people out of school and maybe newspapers and television. In the absence of firsthand experience, these ex-pupils must extrapolate a view of what mainstream school might be like from experiences in mainstream primary schooling and the sources listed above. However several of these sources are not available to these ex-pupils. Both Tony and Mizzie had had relatively short placements in mainstream primary schools. Mizzie was one of three siblings all of whom attended special school for their entire secondary education. Tony was the only child of a single mother. His mother and both uncles had attended all age special school. David's mother and his siblings all attended special schools. In fact at least thirteen of the ex-pupils were either effectively only children, (i.e. if they had siblings they were either not in regular contact with them or their siblings were much younger and therefore not in a position to share experiences of secondary school), or all their siblings and sometimes their parents attended secondary special school. Generally, as will be seen from accounts below, the ex-pupils did not mix with neighbourhood peers. Their limited literacy skills would severely restrict what they could access from print media and, though television could be a source of information, their access to unprejudiced accounts of mainstream secondary education via that medium could also be restricted. Therefore the sources of information about mainstream secondary schools available to them were very limited indeed.

If what limited sources of information one has are either prejudiced or, as in the case of Tony and Mizzie, very frightening, then one's perspective is going to be different from someone who has firsthand experience and can access all of these sources. Pupils who experienced what they described as bullying in mainstream primary schools may not have experienced anything different from other pupils but their perspective never had the chance to be tempered by positive experiences of secondary education.

It is, however, quite possible that the ex-pupils were indeed bullied because of their particular needs, their 'slowness' as they chose to describe it, and that had they progressed to mainstream secondary schools they would have continued to have relatively more negative experiences than their peers. One needs to be mindful that this study is about the ex-pupils' perspectives, and not about arguing why those perspectives could or should be otherwise. It is about what they believed, not whether this was a belief that one could rationally hold.

There were other items which arose from ex-pupils' descriptions of mainstream schools. These were to do with staff, facilities, scale and support received. However items discussed under these headings tended to be negative relative to how the same items were perceived in special school and are therefore discussed under special education below.

4.5.2. Special school

The curriculum: Learning in the special school

When referring to learning in special school, the ex-pupils mostly mentioned core subjects including: aspects of literacy such as reading, writing, spelling and speech, maths, usually number, and applications of maths such as handling money, and science.

'They taught me how to write, err get my speech right, they taught me how to count numbers they… get my money right and…….'
(Simon)

The ex-pupils talked about a general improvement in learning and increasing knowledge:

'Errm…well…I really liked…being at the school…I learnt a lot……'
(Nadine)

H: … I have got a lot of knowledge that I would…wouldn't have had if I…I'd 'a gone to… (mainstream).
(Hannah)

David talked about how the special school taught respect and was better at teaching life skills than they were at college and how this helped boost his confidence. He credited the special school with developing his ability to travel around the world independently.

R: So what training do you think special school gave you that prepared you well for college then?
D: Sort of being adultly and grown up about things.
R: In what way did they do that?
D: Sort of like learning how to respect other people. How to errm…based on life,

… …

D: How to live 'nd sort of thing like that 'nd to cope, but I realised I knew by my T (special school) skills, how to live and cope…[*Right]*…'nd it's made me go to O (distant country) and back.
(David)

Several said that the special school provided them with a 'good education' and as Hannah added in a way that was 'easier to understand'.

Mizzie thought that what she learnt in special school had helped her to 'do her books' in her current job. She agreed with her brother Ewan that it would have been better if they had never attended mainstream school and gone straight to special school, that way she would have learnt more. I asked Mizzie whether she felt she could have learnt to read in mainstream school:

M: Errr Well no I don't think I could have done…. if they haven't got time to sit with you all the kids like.
(Mizzie)

The amount of support that was available in mainstream school and special school was the theme that was most often referred to by the ex-pupils and is discussed further below.

The curriculum: Preference for practical curriculum in the special school

There was a strong preference for the practical subjects and activities experienced in special school. Talking about them evoked fond memories for the ex-pupils.

Barry and Tim referred to the fact that there was 'lots of interesting things to do' in the special school, they particularly mentioned art, PE and CDT. These three together with cooking were overwhelmingly the subjects that the ex-pupils talked about and remembered fondly.

The first recollection of the special school that Darren described was woodwork:

D: ……Errm because I used to love the woodwork…….[*Mmm*.] I still got some things that I actually made. Still going like a cupboard, [*Mmm*]… a fold up table what I made. Still got all of them.
(Darren)

Darren was asked what his best memory of special school was. He answered:

D: ……Drama. I liked the drama.

… …

D: 'Cos I used to like the errrrm… school… Christmas……..errrm Christmas plays……..'Cos mainly I used to be main part.
…….
(Darren)

Terry and Tony also had fond memories of drama:

Te: Pr… the best bits of T (special school) would have to be the errr ……. Always liked the Christmas pantomime, the Christmas pantomimes when I was Jack and B (pupil) was the giant, I can remember doing that. And I can remember, remember doing two nativities, narrating 'em .
(Terry)

T: I remember the plays we used to do…. And I was some…… I did some, most good parts in plays …..errm first ever play I did……I was a dancer and another part I did main parts like I did being a king in one of them.[Mmm].Err errrm being the old man in 'Jack…….'Jack and the Beanstalk'…. Errm……..I remember one funny part I got is the last time we did a play … I think it was the last year I was here…I had the honours to err splat Mr M. With a pie in his face….
(Tony)

There were many similar references to all practical subjects. Cooking, woodwork/CDT, science, PE, including: cross-country, running, swimming football, art particularly animation work, drama and music, featured in their conversations frequently, whereas there was only very limited reference to maths and single references to IT, French, English, history and RE.

Ewan felt that they did a bit more practical work in the special school than in mainstream school. I had been asking him how he felt special school differed from mainstream school...

R: .... would you have done the same sorts of things in mainstream regards making stuff?
E: Errrm……No I think… I think I did a bit more here *[Do you?]*…than in the mainstream ye. *[Right right].* It's better here (special school) than in the mainstream really. *[Because]…*You do a lot more stuff here.
(Ewan)

Perhaps what the ex-pupils felt was best summed up by Ewan who said:

E: ….with the errr using pen and paper, it's a bit boring like.
(Ewan)

The curriculum: Extra-curricular activities/Visits in the special school

Extra-curricular activities, particularly visits, both day and residential visits, frequently featured in the ex-pupils' recollections of special school.

The first thing that Naomi did when asked to describe her memories of special school was to recount two separate visits:

N: 'My memories was like when I went down to like London and… and errm…well when we went to get the (a)wards. And that was so really good with err…like you know err… with Mr D and and the side and had photos and (indistinguishable) it was like wow you know, and I never been to like London and so… that was really good. I went to D (Welsh seaside town) with er…errm you know with all my friends and everything else so ye…. And err I… I… I liked it (laughs) really you know.'
(Naomi)

School residential holidays were one of the first things that Diane recalled of her time at special school:

D: It's errm the best school in U (town where special school is)… 'nd it's got nice staff and……..nice felicities (facilities) …for… us. Errm …….What else …… st…. They take yer on holiday and……it's just one of the nice places to come.
(Diane)

Brian, Maria, Tracey and Mizzie recalled school visits and holidays, and three of the ex-pupils drew or noted visits on their drawings of a typical special school.

Support with learning in the special school

Seventeen of the ex-pupils referred to the support, help or attention they were given in lessons in special school and the relative lack of it in mainstream school.

Tim felt the support in special school was a defining difference between mainstream and special school:

T: School…basically for me, for here (special school attended), s' like a normal school…s' just they treat you the same…but if you got stuck on something they're there for ya…….
(Tim)

Barry agreed:

B: Well…when you come 'ere (special school attended) you get more help…and like you say, there's not just a teacher in the same room you've got a helper as well so they can do two things at once. In my other school (mainstream) there was only one.
R: So do you think that's the big thing?
B: Yeah.
R: The big difference?
B: Yeah more help.
(Barry)

Simon also felt that the increased help you got in special school was the main difference between the two schools. His responses to my questioning around what the teachers were like in mainstream schools opened up a theme that others alluded to i.e. that mainstream staff were too busy, and sometimes with matters other than the pupils in front of them:

S: …The teachers in my primary school were… errr…helpful err…with the work that I did. In special school they were … errr very helpful. They… when somebody needs help … they… you can ask for (it).
R: Could you ask for help in your primary school?
S: …Errr not all the time…..
R: What would stop you from doing that?
S: Like…errr if we want…had to do like maths 'n that …or numbers you have to learn to do it on your own…….
R: Why's that ?... ... What… what was it that stopped you asking for help…….
S: Errr the…
R: …or why didn't you get the help?
S: The teachers were errr…always busy all the time.
R: Right. OK. So what do you think made them more busy than the teachers in the special school? What was it that made them more busy?
S: They were like always in different classes…keep going to different classes.....

… …

S: The… err… special school you can get err help all the t… all the time, …and……
R: Why was that…..I'm not quite sure why that is? What is it that makes special school you can have help all the time but not in a primary school?...I wonder why that is?
S: ……..errr you can get help sometimes… help sometimes and sometimes you can't get help…….Because the teachers… errr sometimes they (indistinguishable- 'say'?) 'try and do it on your'…(own?)
(Simon)

Simon later explained that the teachers that were in the other classes would come and ask his teacher to help them out with papers.

David also recognised how busy mainstream teachers were and how this meant he didn't have the help or time he would have liked to finish his work:

D: Ye they (special school teachers) give you time. They don't think. 'Oh come on let's get this over with.' They was caring. I mean I was at X Junior (local mainstream junior school), it was a bit thinking errm…'C'mon, oh it's all right we'll give you a hand to do it quicker.' than give you time to help you to read and spell.

… …

R: …what was the difference between the teachers at X (mainstream junior school) and the teachers in special school?
D: I didn't get any…much help…
R: …Right. And you said something about the teachers saying, 'Come on…
D: Sort of like… 'cos I was taking ages ago, they were sort of trying…just let me say…'Oh you can finish it off later.' But they don't, they just let me just… just… just errm…let me do it but they didn't errm you know let me finish it off, just say I've done it, but errm…
R: I suppose they're very busy aren't they?
D: Ye. That's because they've got thirty…
(David)

Tim was not quite so benevolent in his description of mainstream teachers' activities but ultimately agreed with most of the ex-pupils that the size of mainstream classes, or more correctly the pupil: adult ratio, was generally felt to be to blame for the teachers in mainstream schools not being able to give the help they needed:

R: ....So if I say what was the biggest difference between…mainstream school and this special school…what would you say it was T?
T: Get more 'elp don't ya.
R: Get more help.
T: Yeah.
R: Anything else?
T: The teachers are there for you, that's the most important thing I think.
R: Did you not feel that in your mainstream school?
T: No…
R: In what…
T: As I was in my other (mainstream) school they says do this work do that work and they used to go to somewhere else like in the corner drinking their coffee…..but in this (special) school…they're still there looking over you and if you look stuck they come and help ya. [*Right.]* They didn't do that at mainstream.
R: And was that really in mainstream that you felt that there wasn't enough what?….support from the teachers?
T: Yeah there wasn't.
R: In every lesson or…they're must've been some lessons.
T: It's mostly all the lessons that just…they'll help you a bit not as much as this school (special school attended).
R: Is that because there were such big classes do you think or…
T: Yeah.
R: That they just couldn't get round people?
T: There's quite a lot in our class. I think there's about….over twenty six pupils
R: Right.
T: And obviously…

R: Do you think it was all that?
T: It could 'a' been some o' that…but in this school there's only like…hold on there's only 'bout eighteen…may…
… …
T: Yeah. Eighteen pupils in a class, *[Mmm*], so the teacher could get around and see every one of us near enough.
R: So do you think that's the…the difference?
T: Yeah. It's…it's the size of the class really and the pupils, there's too many pupils in these classes there's…'specially the normal senior schools…way too many.
(Tim)

Although Darren had very little memory of his year in mainstream education, his impression was also that 'they overcrowd' the mainstream schools and this meant they couldn't spend as much time with you as the teachers in special school.

Ewan, who had attended mainstream primary school for six years, explained

E: ……Well you're stuck on anything like you know, a word or something or writing like, then you help out here (special school) like.

He went on to explain that the increased help in special school was:

'Cos there's only a few of us like.
(Ewan)

For Maria the extra attention in special school was the cause of her happiness there and the lack of help was the source of her unhappiness in mainstream:

R: Were you happy there (mainstream school)?
M: No.
R: You weren't happy there?
M: No.
R: Why weren't you happy there?
M: Didn't really get any… enough attention…..or…[*Right*]… one to one.*[Right, from?]* The teachers.

… …

R: Were you happy when you came to T (special school)?
M: Ye.

… …

R: Why do you think it was that you were happy when you came here (special school) but you were unhappy at primary school?
M: ……More attention….. *[More attention?]* Ye. *[From teachers?…]* Ye.
(Maria)

Bella said that you always had to ask for help in the mainstream school and in the end you....

B: ...probably wouldn't get any help 'ave to do it for myself……
(Bella)

For the same reason she would now choose special school again:

Diane agreed, she had said that given the choice again she would choose to attend the special school instead of a mainstream school:

D: 'cos the staff are more helpful 'n polite…'n never…[*never….]* Like never help in mainstream as more as they do here (special school).
(Diane)

When I asked Tracey which type of school she would choose for her own hypothetical child she said she would send them to special school because...

'…When I was in mainstream they didn't do so much help for me. Mainly we had little group….But that was just on a one day a week.'
(Tracey)

Hannah agreed:

'I'd 'a' been way out me depth if I'd a gone to a mainstream school. I don't think I'd 'a' been… I mean I did struggle a bit when I was here (special school) but I don't think it's as bad as when …if I was at a mainstream school, 'cos it…you…they help you more here (special school)'
(Hannah)

Again she thought it was a question of numbers and time as did Terry who thought he would send his child to special school because of its advantageous pupil: teacher ratio.

Tony blamed his expulsion from mainstream infant school on the lack of help for him in that school:

T: 'Cos they chucked me out.
R: … … ….Tell me again why they kicked you out.
T: 'Cos I had… 'cos they couldn't control me they said …and they… I was a bit slow of learning, just a bit. [*Right*] But they wasn't spending time with me to help me. …So they just 'cided to make up lies to get me out of school.
(Tony)

Kirk felt that there wouldn't be as much help available in mainstream school or even within a special unit within the mainstream school as he had had at special school.

However...

R: If you'd got…the same number of help and the same size classes in mainstream…do you think mainstream would then be as good as a special school?
T: Never.
B: No.
T: No.
(Barry and Tim)

...as Barry and Tim agree here, the ex-pupils seemed to think that there is more to it than that.

The nurturing nature of the special school

There were several references to what I summarised as 'The nurturing nature of the special school'. In the transcript excerpt immediately above Barry and Tim alluded to there being something else besides a better pupil: teacher ratio. Tim went on to say:

T:….There's a bond i'n't there…between the teachers and the pupils…I think….They're much closer…Like B said…it's like family. You come from one home to another. They don't treat you as…well they do in certain ways but……they don't treat you as pupils. [*Mmm*].They try their hardest to look after you and help and…..it's like one big family really…..If you had any problems you could tell the teacher [*Mmmm*]….and the teacher would try and sort it
(Tim)

Barry had commented:

B: Well here (special school) it's not just like a school. It's like uh…
T: Family.
B: It's like a family…..family basis.
(Barry and Tim)

Diane also chose the analogy of a 'big family' to describe special schools:

D: '...special schools are better place to send people with learning difficulties 'n 'cos the treat you like a big family there ...'
(Diane)

In similar vein Brian described the special school as...

'...sort of like a nursery but for sort of older kids…….

… …

'Cos… you get looked after, …you get helped like with your work, and y…..well it's like ……like if you pl….If you go on the playground, you got people watching over you.....
R: And how wou….. how's that different from mainstream school?
B: Mainstream…it's sort of more calmed, calmed down 'n mainstream….

The staff in the special school

The ex-pupils felt there was something special about the staff in special schools. They variously described the teachers as polite (Diane), helpful (Darren, Diane, Ewan), strict (Nadine), close (Barry and Tim), understanding (Darren) and nice (Simon) or very nice (Mizzie).

Nadine described her relationship with the teachers:

N: '...came here (special school) and I got on with all the teachers. Errm I was…I was able to get on with the work……and the teachers... they looked out for me like, you know. If I ever had a problem I … I could just go… to like Mrs. C. (teacher) for instance...I used to go and talk to her about my problems. She always used to look out for me….'
(Nadine)

Nadine described 'being around' the staff, Bella also hinted that she derived some security from 'being around the staff' in the special school. These feelings about special school staff were repeated in the ex-pupils drawings or word lists of typical special schools. Kirk wrote: 'Friendly assistants and teachers'. Maria's list included: 'Kind teachers' and 'Teachers being there when you need them to talk to'. Mizzie and Nadine each drew or described a teacher in the playground of the special school and explained to me that he/she was talking to the children, Mizzie added that the teacher was looking after them. Terry listed: 'Very safe- relaxed', 'Like a happy family', 'Good support system', 'Helped me to achieve what I could do' and 'Always had the best interest in me'. Hannah wrote: 'It's more cosier in special school.' Brian's word list said: 'When you're stuck on work you get help', 'Looked after at break times', 'Teachers being polite and helpful', and 'Teachers having fun with the kids at break times like on pancake day and sports day'. Brian was not the only ex-pupil to refer to 'fun' at the special school.

Fun at the special school

At least half of the ex-pupils described the fun they had at special school, both in interview and on their drawings/word lists describing a typical special school.

Diane thought the school residential holidays that she didn't experience in mainstream would be fun, but it was not only particular activities that generated pleasure in special school, like several others, she remembered particular teachers with whom she had had fun, she described one as:

D: A right laugh in class.
(Diane)

And from Kirk:

K: …I remember doing like PE….I liked doing art with errrm Mr X. Always had fun with him. [*Good*] …..he was quite funny.
(Kirk)

Tony also recalled how his tutor made him laugh and he remembered that friends at special school were a source of fun too:

'I had f…quite fun in the class with my friends playing outside and things like that.'
(Tony)

The first comment that Barry made at interview when asked to tell me something about the special school was:

'T (special school),…It was funny. It was great. It was the best school I've ever been to… out of them all……'
(Barry)

Again David referred to a particular teacher and he had also described the residential holidays with school as a source of fun.

Others also referred to fun. I asked Mizzie if she thought putting extra staff into mainstream schools would encourage her to send a child of hers to a mainstream school:

M: Well probably but I mean you didn't have no…err no err you know the (indistinguishable) to go on trips or have fun …you don't know if that's gonna... child's gonna (en)joy that school because he might get beaten up and or even don't have fun anymore.
(Mizzie)

At the end of their interview, ex-pupils were always asked to describe the special school they went to in three words. Kirk's words were: interesting, supportive and **fun.** He added:

K: I guess……I know I enjoyed it at T (special school) 'cos I had fun in most of my lessons.'
(Kirk)

Scale

Nearly half the ex-pupils raised issues under a theme I have called 'Scale'. By scale I mean matters to do with relative size of classes, buildings, classrooms and schools in general. These were matters to do with more than pupil: staff ratios about which I have already presented the ex-pupils' comments, they were to do with pupil: space ratios and physical accessibility of staff.

Hannah described mainstream schools as 'daunting'. I asked her to which type of school, mainstream or special, she would send a child of hers, she chose special school because:

H: .....a mainstream like a.. is a…like a lot bigger school 'n that and you… you're not in like one classroom where … it wasn't when I was there. I mean you had to keep changing classes 'n that 'n I think it's a bit mind boggling but in like this school (special school attended), it's not as big…[*Right].*… well it's bigger now but err…*[Ye].*… it's not as daunting going to different classes but that's how I….I was when I was… thingy….. just didn't like a big school.

… …

H: …and plus I didn't like a big… like I'd rather have like a little school where it's not as big…*[Mmm]*…'n you can work your way around the school properly 'n that errm.
(Hannah)

Ewan told of when his mainstream primary school burnt down and they were temporarily accommodated in part of the neighbouring secondary school. He felt there was more help in the special school but he didn't seem to think this was just because of the numbers of pupils per teacher; there was something about the physical size of the building that meant help was more distant:

E: ……Well you're stuck on anything like you know. A word or something or writing like, then you help out here (special school) like.
*R: Right. And do you think that's just because we have smaller classes here (*in special school*)?*
E: ……..errrrrr ……no.
R: …or is there another reason?
E: Err ye…… I thi…… errrrrrm.. ……I think so ye…… …..smaller classes like. …….That one I went to.. the next door to T (mainstream school) one… you know they had a bigger space like. You know like way all way down the bottom end like you know. So…
R: And how would you have managed with that? Would you have liked that? Would you have liked to have gone to that school?
E: Err……not really, no.
R: Why not?
E: You know they're quite far away, there wasn't anybody helping you out like. There's like you know quite a few of us like.
… …
R: So what was that like when you moved into there (the secondary school building)?
E: Errr…… was qu…..you know 'cos big area like you know…[*Ye]*… compared to these, it's smaller like, the classes are.

R: Right. And which one feels best to you?
D: Oh these ones (in the special school) are better.
(Ewan)

Ewan went on to tell of his friend who got lost in 'the big school' and was 'beaten up' because of it. Whereas Ewan didn't get bullied, which he thought was...

'...'cos we had the same teachers you see. We was just in the same two classrooms, we was using them, ...'
(Ewan)

Tracey preferred the smaller groups in the special school; this may have been to do with the disadvantageous pupil: teacher ratio in mainstream, but she seems to be implying it was more to do with her coping with the numbers of pupils in her class than any lack of support:

T: ... ... it was more li…. lower. [*Smaller groups…?]*…groups in T (special school) than there was in XS (primary school), 'cos I found it quite difficult there because with the large... there was loads….round about thirty…eighteen in T (special school) …
(Tracey)

Interestingly both Bella and Diane thought that the classrooms in the special school were larger than those in mainstream. I had asked Diane what she noticed was different when she left her mainstream school and started at the special school:

D: The classrooms more bigger here (in the special school) than….
R: The classrooms here were bigger?
D: …and better.
R: And better? How? How were they better?
D: B…Junior schools a bit smaller. And you have to wait until somebody sits down on the floor 'til you sit down, *[Right]* and T (special school) it's just… it's all go together and sit down.

*R: Tell me again I don't quite understand, at E (*mainstream junior school*)…*
D: Ye.
R: …in the classrooms…
D: Ye you w…
R: …what used to happen?
D: You had to wait 'til somebody like….like see if you could sit down and then…then you had to sit down 'n there's a bit awkward.
(Diane)

This may have been more to do with the ratio of pupil: area than the actual size of the room though it is possible that the room was actually smaller than the special school classrooms.

The theme of scale did not feature in the ex-pupils' drawings or word lists describing a typical special school. However there was frequent mention of scale in their drawings of typical mainstream schools. This included reference to: large classes in mainstream (David), it being too crowded (Maria), too many people in one classroom (Tim), it being a lot bigger than the special school and the consequent perpetual moving from classroom to classroom (Hannah). Tracey wrote of there being, '...lots and lots of people in one class, more, lots and lots of students' in mainstream school. Just one ex-pupil (Diane) thought that mainstream school had fewer pupils than special school.

Facilities in the special school

During interview there were occasional references to facilities in special and mainstream schools.

I asked David what he thought the 'bad bits' about special school were:

D: … Errm…they didn't have much technology like they got now….it's… it's because the government was taking ages to put the money towards… for our, err…our needs… 'cos when you think about it ND, BE (mainstream secondary schools) 's had these for years, these sort of luxuries, it would be nice if p…to give us a bit…about ten years ago.

… …

D: Like a science room, [*Science room, yes].*Errm….computer room,… [*Yes*]I know computers wasn't that good ten years ago, but it would 'a' been nice to have had a few errm…….Sort of more sport areas. I mean it would 'a' been nice, what we got now, had a few years ago.*[Mmm*] Would be nice.
(David)

Similarly, Terry associated mainstream school with 'good ICT facilities' which featured in his word list to describe a typical mainstream school.

The only other negative comment made during interview regards facilities in special school was when Kirk talked about restricted access to subjects there:

K: I don't remember doing like chemistry like at school. Well I remember like other schools they did like other…lessons we didn't have.
(Kirk)

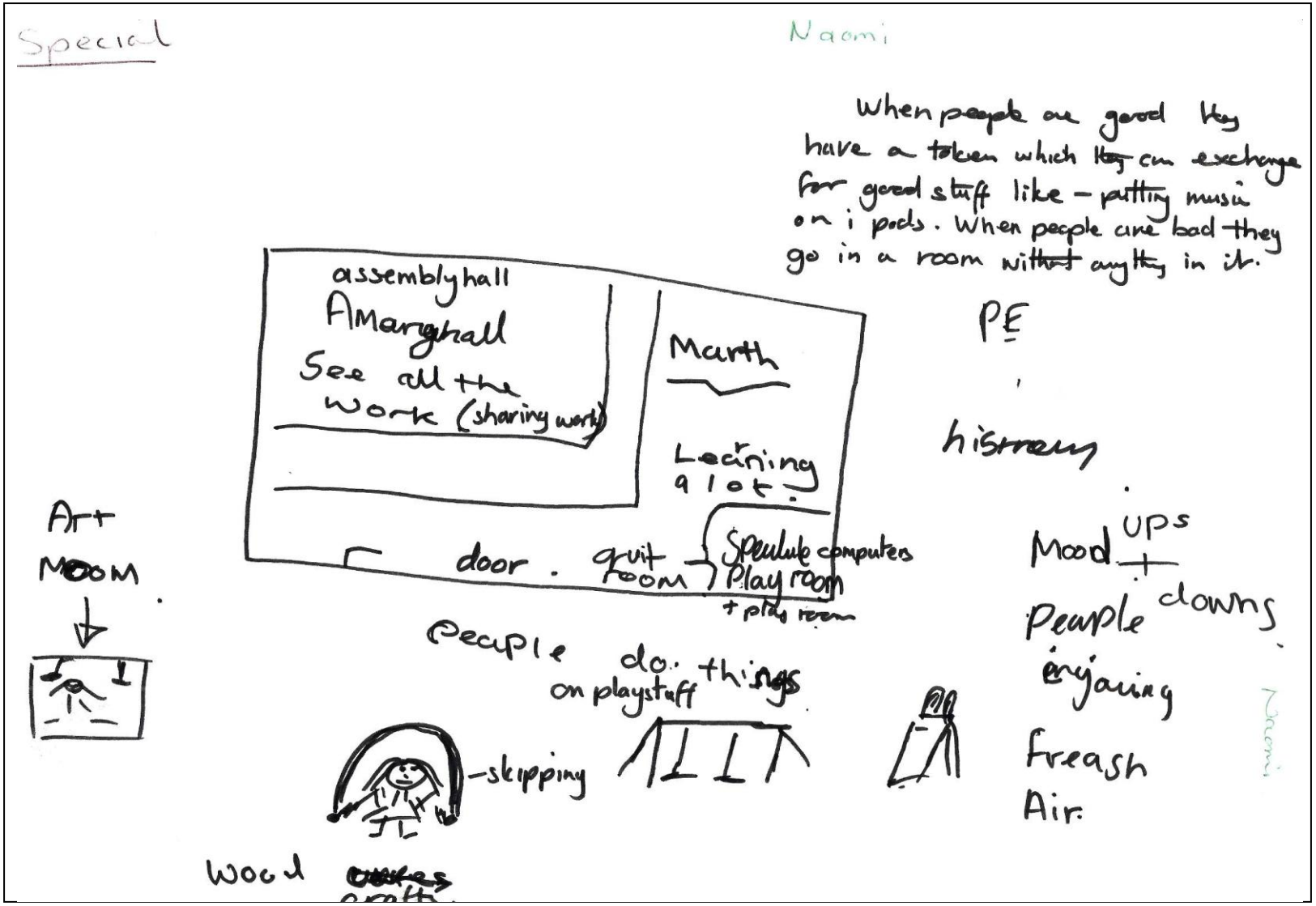
There was some reference, interestingly all from females, during interviews (Diane, Tracey) and in drawings and word lists (Mizzie, Naomi, Tracey) to the play equipment on the special school playground and the lack of it in mainstream schools. Naomi drew similar pictures for typical special and mainstream schools. However they differed in that the special school had a swing, a slide and a girl skipping outside the school and the drawing was annotated with: 'People enjoying fresh air', 'wood crafts' and 'people do things on play-stuff', whereas the mainstream school had a football match outside, outdoor and indoor swimming pools and a garden centre. She annotated the mainstream school drawing with: 'There would be more to do in the mainstream school. That's why they call it main.'(Naomi) (See drawings 5 and 6).

The only other reference to facilities in special and mainstream schools was from Tracey. It was Tracey who had raised a gender issue in saying that had she gone to mainstream school she wouldn't have been the only girl in the group. She now mentioned the fact that in mainstream school she felt there would be separate cloakrooms for boys and girls. In a quite separate issue it was Tracey who also mentioned that in special school the library was small but in mainstream school it would be large.

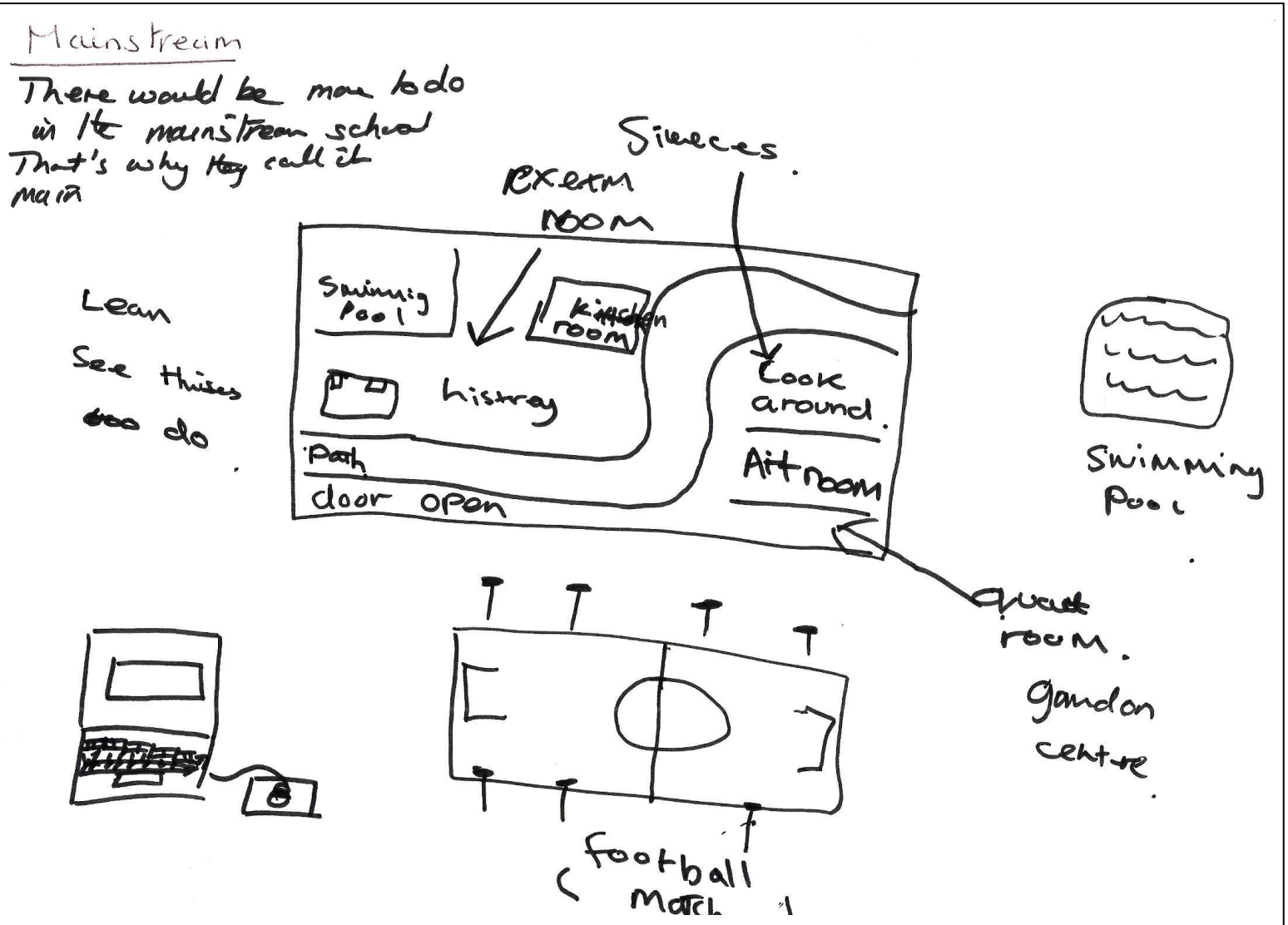
Bad behaviour in the special school

Several ex-pupils made reference to bad behaviour in special school. These were fairly specific, sometimes one off occasions.

Bella said that she was sometimes upset in special school, but when I asked her if she remembered anyone being nasty to her in special school she said it only happened once and she declined to talk about the incident.



Drawing 5: Naomi's drawing of special school



Drawing 6: Naomi's drawing of mainstream school

Brian recalled being put in detention for bullying another pupil in special school. Diane recalled how after being bullied in mainstream school, she still got bullied in special school, in fact she felt she was bullied more in special school than she had been in mainstream school. In contrast to this Tim was emphatic that there was no bullying in the special school:

T: Yeah….So I had nearly five years here…and that five years I spent here I was happy…didn't get bullied or nothing did we?
B: No.
T: There was no bullying in the school.
(Barry and Tim)

Though as Barry and Tim go on to say, this may have been more to do with the fact that Barry was the tallest boy in school and his much shorter friend Tim never left his side.

Simon recalled some bullying in his early days at the special school:

S: ...when I errr… came … first came to T (special) school they kept on picking on me. ……..*[Right].* Err when I settled down they st… started to be my friends……..
… …

S: They … they keep… one errr…lad, I don't know his name, ….he keep pushing me down to the ground……*[Right]. …..*…..and all the time.
(Simon)

David spoke about pupils in the special school who hampered learning in the class with their behaviour. He seemed to have some understanding that the 'special needs' of such pupils lay in their behaviour rather than actual learning difficulties.

D: …they're got… they got special needs but they haven't got slow learner. They've… you can't sense if they got it or not…*[Right.]*…You can't sense if they're…

… …

D: They was putting the class behind sort of thing, that's the only thing. *[Right].* Sort of…
… …

D: Sort of being stupid and putting the class behind.
R: Bad behaviour?
D: Ye. I know you get that everywhere but…*[Right]* but err…
R: Slowing the class up, is that what you mean…
D: Ye ye.
R: …'putting it behind'? Right. I'm with you.
D: But I'm not jus err naming names but it was quite… you can get that with normal schools but…… it's sort of grown up. *[Right] w*hich if you got to a special…if you went to a normal school I could be more bullied 'n more annoyed with people 'cos they can…bully you and call you names 'n that's when can depression can come.
(David)

Tim mentioned 'naughty children' in the special school. I had asked him what was different in the special school from mainstream school amongst others he mentioned:

T: They're…..some of the pupils when I was here (special school)…were quite……naughty….*[Right]* Some had bad tempers and used to kick off like mad.
(Tim)

There were four references under bullying in the drawings/word lists describing special school. One of them was a reference to being bullied at special school from Daniel, though at interview he had denied ever being bullied in special school. The other three were references to the absence of bullying or bad behaviour from special school. Darren wrote, 'everyone getting on and being happy together', Tim wrote 'never got bullied by anyone' and Nadine wrote 'no bullying'

Affection for the special school

The ex-pupils talked of their affection for the special school they attended.

Sometimes the interview session was ended by asking the ex-pupil to describe the special school in three words; the words they used are shown in Table 17.

Ex-pupil	Descriptions of special school
Amy	-
Barry	-
Bella	safe to be with teachers
Brian	caring, looked after
Daniel	-
Darren	
David	fantastic, good team work
Diane	-
Ewan	-
Hannah	good, knowledgeable
Kirk	interesting, supportive, fun
Maria	excellent, brilliant
Mizzie	-
Nadine	-
Naomi	good, brilliant, excellent
Simon	good, excellent, perfect
Terry	very good school
Tim	-
Tony	-
Tracey	happy, fantastic, enjoyable

Table 17: Adjectives used by the ex-pupils to describe the special school they attended

They were often asked to describe the 'good bits' and the 'bad bits' about the special school. Their responses were remarkably similar:

N: … … I haven't got worst bits really.*[No?]* All good. (laughs)
(Naomi)

B: Worst bits? There ain't none.
(Barry)

M: There was no bad bits.
R: No bad bit?
M: Mmm.
R: No bad bits at all? You can't remember anything?
M: Not really. No.
(Maria)

Mizzie did have a bad experience whilst attending the special school but she still thought there wasn't much 'badness' in the school

M: Errr…….really, got beaten by one kid didn't I? Err but the headmaster err sorted it out. Err…… there was no really much errr badness really because errr errrr I got on with everybody, all the teachers…. all the kids, everybody really.
(Mizzie)

In fact Mizzie had great affection for the school:

M: ……err it was really e…..err excellent time.
… …
it was great fun I really, really had a great time at school

… …

R: ……If somebody asked you which school you went to…
M: Ye.
R: You know somebody you were talking to in where you live….
M: Ye a lot of people do…
R: …and what do you say?
M: I say T. special school.
R: Ye.
M: And they say, 'What it was like?' And I say it was a brilliant time …(indistinguishable)…I had a great time.
(Mizzie)
Mizzie recommends the school to others:

M: … … I recommend it to a lot of friends, say why…you know … go to T. school (special school), see if they help ya. And they always do …..(indistinguishable)… chosen them now.*[Good]* and errr… I say… they say oh it's great. I had a great time, I think they did as well .....
(Mizzie)

Darren thought the worst bit about special school was when he couldn't go to school because he was ill, and Nadine couldn't contemplate attending another school when she was at the special school:

N: I was happy here (special school), I didn't want to go anywhere else, I was really settled. I mean if somebody would have moved me to somewhere else then I would have been really unhappy because you know I was really settled here (special school) …which I was.
(Nadine)

Tracey and Hannah were really happy to have attended special school and the only thing that Ewan would change about his education would be to only have gone to the special school for the whole of his education rather than starting at the mainstream school:

E: Oh st…ye it's better to start here (special school) than going…[*Why?]*…to the rest of them.
R: Why? … Why would you have been better to start here (special school)?
E: Errm……it's errr better it's a lot better really.
(Ewan)

Diane described her sadness when she left the special school:

D: .....it's just one of the nice places to come…….for people like me. And I was a bit sad to leave seven years ago and……
(Diane)

I had asked Tim about a difficult time when some pupils from mainstream were calling him names. I suggested that at that time perhaps he wished he had gone to mainstream school and he agreed, but then added:

T: But deep down I still.....love T (special school).
(Tim)

Summary of findings within the meta-theme: Special school

Ex-pupils generally felt that they learnt and made academic progress in special school. When talking about learning they referred mainly to the core subjects but there was also mention of learning respect, improving life skills, gaining confidence and generally improved knowledge and learning. Some said they felt they had had a 'good education' at the special school and gave examples of how what they learnt had been useful to them in later life.

The practical subjects were the ones they remembered well and often with fondness. Other popular aspects of the special school were the day and residential visits.

Of all themes the increased classroom support in special school relative to mainstream was most often talked about. Ex-pupils recognised that there was more support available in special school and several identified this as the main difference between the two settings. They were mostly benevolent in their explanation for this, they didn't blame the mainstream school staff, but explained that the mainstream classes were overcrowded, too large and had too few staff. Help was sometimes at a premium in the mainstream schools, much in demand and therefore difficult to obtain, whereas in the special school it seemed to be always available. Some pupils hinted at there being not enough time for them, being rushed to complete work, and the completion

of work being more important than any learning gained from its completion. Getting adequate attention appeared, for some, to be the difference between happiness and unhappiness at school and several ex-pupils thought that they could have sustained their place in a mainstream school had adequate help been available.

However many of the ex-pupils recognised that pupil: teacher ratios were not the only special feature of the special school. Many talked of the caring nature of the special school; four likened it to a family and a fifth to a 'nursery for older kids'. The creation of this nurturing atmosphere was largely accredited to the special school staff. There was talk of teachers being there for you, a bond between pupils and staff, talking through problems with staff, and a closeness. One ex-pupil said that the special school was a cosier place to be.

There was much talk of fun in the special school. The ex-pupils' enjoyment of particular activities in the school year and of particular teachers who made their lessons enjoyable was evident, as was talk of having fun with peers. The remarks of two ex-pupils stand out in this context. One ex-pupil said he knew he enjoyed the special school because he had great fun in most of his lessons, the other said being at the special school was great fun, she, '...really, really had a great time at the special school.'

An interesting and perhaps unexpected theme emerged to do with scale. This was extra to the previously discussed issue of pupil: teacher ratio. Mainstream schools

were perceived as too big, daunting, places where you could get lost, places where you had to move from class to class, and places where support was inaccessible due to the physical distance of the staff. There was also reference by one ex-pupil to the 'loads' of children in her mainstream class with which she found it difficult to cope. Generally the ex-pupils preferred the small scale of the organisation of the special school but also they seemed to get more space per pupil in the special school.

This theme needs further research. Though I believe I have represented here what the ex-pupils were meaning, it is possible that my understanding is erroneous. Further research would include teasing out what the ex-pupils were referring to when describing classes as: bigger, larger, smaller etc. A bigger class could be a larger area, more pupils, a high or low pupil: area ratio or indeed any combination of these.

A small theme emerged which I called 'facilities'. There was some reference to the relative lack of IT facilities and to a restricted curriculum in the special school, and a lack of playground play facilities in the mainstream schools. One female ex-pupil did refer to the separate cloakrooms that she associated with the mainstream school. When placed alongside her earlier comment about being the only girl in the class in the special school, gender implications begins to look like another theme that would bear further research.

Bad behaviour in special school did not emerge as a large concern. Three pupils described being bullied in special school, one quite extensively the others were one

off occasions. Other pupils were sure there was no bullying in the special school and some spoke of the way pupils got on well together.

There were two references to bad behaviour other than bullying, to pupils 'kicking off' and to disruptive behaviour in the classroom which was perceived to hamper learning.

There was unanimous affection for the special school. Even those who, as we shall see below, regretted that they didn't attend mainstream secondary school, invariably spoke of their fondness for the special school. Many said they wouldn't change a thing about their education and two said the only thing they would change would be to have attended the special school for the entirety of their education. The ex-pupils generally found it difficult or impossible to think of 'bad things' that they had experienced in the special school.

In summary ex-pupils found the special school to be a place where they learnt and made progress and where they derived much enjoyment from the practical subjects in particular. They overwhelmingly acknowledged the increased classroom help they experienced in the special school, and for many the relatively poor provision of similar help in mainstream was the aspect which made a placement in mainstream untenable. They also valued the nurturing nature of the relationship they had with staff in the special school and the fun they experienced. They felt that the special school provided them with relatively better conditions for learning and thriving within

school in terms of numbers of pupils, space per pupil, numbers per group and movement around school. Bad behaviour was not a big issue though some did refer to instances of bullying and poor behaviour. There was unanimous affection for the special school.

Discussion of findings within the meta-theme: Special school

First it is necessary to question whether the ex-pupils were saying what they really believed. It is possible that they were putting a positive slant on their special school experience to please me, they all knew me quite well, if I hadn't actually taught them in the special school, they had all attended the school whilst I taught there. There is evidence that interviewees will attempt to please the interviewer (see Ch. 4). With this knowledge I attempted to always facilitate a response that perhaps the ex-pupil thought might displease me, i.e. to compensate for the possibility of them saying something that was not truly representative of what they really thought in order to please me I often encouraged or at least made it easier for them to give a more negative response. For example when asking what the bad bits at special school were, I acted surprised and persisted when they said there weren't any:

R: Anything that you didn't like at T (special school) that was bad, or you didn't like it?
M: No. Just (indistinguishable)…
R: Sorry.
M: There was no bad bits.
R: No bad bits?
M: Mmm.
R: No bad bits at all? You can't remember anything?
M: Not really. No.
(Maria)

Similarly I attempted to encourage them to admit their feelings when asking them if they ever felt ashamed that they had been to special school by quoting other people who had felt ashamed:

R: .....have you ever been…have ever people asked you and you've thought, 'Ooh no I don't want to *tell them that I went to T (special school) school'?*
D: No. I've a…I've always told 'em.
R: Have you ever had anybody sort of say, 'Well what d'you go there for?' or any problem with that?
D: Err I just told 'em why, learning disabilities.
R: Mmm. And they just accept that do they?
D: Ye. Just accept it.
R: Ye. 'Cos sometimes when people talk about having been to special school, we talk about them errrm… almost being ashamed of it, and some people try to hide the fact that they went to special school because they don't like to say they went to T (special school) school. That doesn't happen to you?
D: That doesn't happen to me no. I just bla[tent]nly tell 'em and tell 'em why.
(Darren)

My subjective feeling was that interviewees said what they genuinely felt and there are examples of them talking about things that they might have thought would displease me. For example they told me of bullying in the special school and a particular teacher they disliked and some went on to express a wish that they had not had to attend special school. They also held their views with remarkable consistency, reproducing those views via different methods and usually over long periods of time.

I am satisfied that what the ex-pupils said was largely what they believed and I continue with this discussion on that basis.

In many ways there is nothing surprising here. Many of us have memories which select the good aspects and neglect the more negative ones. Maybe this is just a case

of the ex-pupils viewing the past through 'rose coloured spectacles'. There may also be a tendency to prefer the known to the unknown, the special school attended compared to the mainstream school not attended. Except in this instance they had mostly attended mainstream schools, albeit mainly primary mainstream schools, and the phenomenon was known to them, and on the whole their judgement was that the experience of that phenomenon was not as good as the experience of special school.

Had I similarly interviewed ex-pupils of a mainstream school probably they too would have remembered the practical subjects, the visits and residential experiences best and with fondness. They may also have recalled fun times and fun teachers.

The extent of their enthusiasm for the special school however, is surprising. Superlatives were common as were expressions of: love, changing lives, saving lives, the best thing that ever happened to me, etc. and all this from a cross-section of people who according to their categorisation, found communication challenging.

Their understanding was that the special school worked mainly because of the advantageous pupil: staff ratio. This seemed obvious to them, they bore no malice, but the mainstream school teachers obviously couldn't do their job when there were so many pupils in their class. They mostly had firsthand experience of waiting until the teacher had time to attend to them and rarely getting the attention they felt they needed in order to learn. We shall see below that they had sometimes resisted, or at least found that they had no part in, the decision to send them to special school, so they had no vested interest in making it 'work'. But it always did 'work', sometimes,

as in the case of Brian and Daniel even when they felt they were wrongly placed. It worked in as much as they all judged that they had progressed academically in the special school and they all enjoyed the experience which left them with a lasting affection for the place.

They also recognised that the special school gave them something extra to a favourable pupil: staff ratio and that was the relationship they had with those staff. Maybe this was a consequence of the pupil: staff ratio, because there were less pupils per member of staff then the teachers were able to spend more time with them, but the ex-pupils saw this as the staff being more caring.

The ex-pupils' responses suggest that there is not only an optimal pupil: staff ratio but also an optimal number of pupils in a group, (which is not exactly the same proposition), an optimal area per pupil and maybe an optimal physical distance between staff and pupils and an optimal sized community. None of these propositions are new, but they are affirmed by the ex-pupils in this study. Whilst further discussion of this topic is not possible here it is an area that would benefit from further research.

Perhaps surprisingly, bad behaviour and more specifically bullying were not big issues either in the mainstream or special school. There was an acknowledgement that it does go on and that it occurred more, but not exclusively, in mainstream than special school. It does not seem that this approach, to bullying in particular, was borne

out of resignation to the inevitability of its occurrence. They seemed to be aware that it was unacceptable, and the two ex-pupils who admitted that they had been bullies showed remorse and regret. The others showed, by the way they had sought out authorities to stop the bullying, that they knew it was unacceptable.

4.5.3 Learning difficulties and identity

Learning difficulties

The ex-pupils were always asked why they thought they went to special school. There replies are collected in Table 18.

The most common reason given for being in special school was problems with writing (7) and reading (5). Being slow, or at least not as fast as the others (4) was another reason and there were three mentions each of: speech, maths, not coping, bullying and learning difficulties (unspecified). Two said they were there because of problems with their behaviour and two because they had problems with spelling. There was a single mention of each of epilepsy, Asperger syndrome and lacking confidence. Some pupils mentioned combinations of up to three of these reasons each.

The ex-pupils were not necessarily agreeing with these reasons, either that they had that ‘problem’ or that it was a justifiable reason for them being in special school. They were merely expressing what they understood to be the reason for them attending special school.

The Statements of Special Educational Need for these ex-pupils were not seen. However I have no reason to think that their accounts are not accurate descriptions of why these young people found themselves in special school.

	Ex-pupil's expressed reason for attending special school
Amy	She wouldn't be able to cope in mainstream She wasn't like as quick as them or as fast as they are at writing and stuff and they used to bully her.
Barry	He was slower at reading, writing, maths…everything
Bella	Went to special school because she had problems with writing.
Brian	His parents knew he had something wrong with him. Doctors said he has Asperger syndrome.
Daniel	He used to get bullied a bit and he couldn't cope with the work (in mainstream)
Darren	Had some kind of assessment and they found he had learning disabilities
David	The junior school teachers didn't think he'd cope in mainstream secondary
Diane	She thinks she went to special school because she was born with learning difficulties. Found English and maths difficult
Ewan	Went to sp sch. for reading and writing and 'getting learning'
Hannah	Maths and speech (due to no front teeth)- picked on
Kirk	Thinks he came to special school because he had a behaviour problem. Used to get angry easily at home. Had difficulties learning, basically spelling and reading.
Maria	Went to special school for her reading and writing
Mizzie	Couldn't read, spell or speak properly and lacked confidence
Nadine	Was born to be a bit behind so……. Identified her poor concentration as a problem
Naomi	Says she had learning difficulties but doesn't know what they were
Simon	His disability is epilepsy and learning how to write
Terry	He thinks something to do with his speech. He couldn't string sentences together or anything.
Tim	dyslexic well…got left behind because he didn't get enough help and he lost a load of his work and he slowed down
Tony	He was 'chucked out of mainstream school -because they couldn't control him they said … and he was a bit slow of learning, just a bit.
Tracey	needed special help with her reading and writing and her maths,

Table 18: Reasons given by ex-pupils for why they attended special school

A hierarchy of special needs

It became apparent that at least some of the ex-pupils envisaged a hierarchy of special needs and where they as individuals were placed in that hierarchy.

Tim differentiated between himself and those that... 'really do need special schools.'

R: So ideally are you telling me you'd like special schools to close because then all the special school kids could go to mainstream?

… …

T: Not for some of the students what need ... what really do need special schools.
R: Like....who's that?
T: Down's syndrome kids. *[Right]* People like that.
R: You don't think they could accommodate Down's syndrome kids in mainstream?
T: No because they are a bit of a handful. [*Righ].*Some of 'em are. 'Cos I know a lad who's Down's syndrome and he's a (indistinguishable) handful....*[Mmm]*.....But he's got carers...*[Mmmm]* He's got carers twenty-four seven basically 'cos he's too....too hyperactive for a secondary (mainstream) school.
(Tim)

Tim was not the only ex-pupil to refer to Down syndrome. Simon had been asked whether all children should go to one school:

S: I err think errr people who've got disabilities err should… the important disabilities… should have a choice of staying at the school they are.....Special school…....If *[Sorry, go on]* If they've got a disability.
R: Now you just used a phrase there, 'important disability', what… what do you mean?
S: Like if they've got dyslexia……..
R: Dyslexic? Wh…what do you understand by dyslexic? What does that mean?
S: Err it means like errr can't read or...or write.
R: Right. That's an important disability you think?
S: Ye.
R: .....What are some of the other important disabilities? You said about dyslexia, not being able to read or write. What are the other important disabilities would you say?
S: D.. Down's syndrome.
R: Right…Anything else?
S: Errm……..can't think of any more.
R: Right…. So how do you consider your disability?
S:……My disability I would eeee… less… less important .
(Simon)

Tony differentiated between mental and physical disability. He described people in wheel chairs as 'worse off' than him and went on to give an interesting reason for why he felt that.

Tony was describing leaving special school and starting college:

T: ...you have to get used to different tutors,…….seeing people you wouldn't 'a seen before, … as more normal people……from (mainstream) school going there…….Errm seeing more worse people off than us, what's in wheelchairs and things like that.

… …

R: So what would be bad about closing the special school then? You told me what would be good.
T: It's like people in wheel chairs and people with more worser things.
R: Wh…what sort of things do you consider worse, 'cos you mentioned this before?
T: Err people with sss… a weird name, what's the name ssssss….
R: Cerebral palsy?
T: Ye things like that.
R: That's what we call a physical thing when arms and legs don't work properly.
T: Ye, physical more than mental.
R: More than mental you're saying?
T: Ye. *[Right. Right]* At least with mental you can actually sort that out, at the end of life you can sort of … but with the other one you can't. It's the way you're born and the way you're made. *[Right]* But you gotta live with that. But us, we can sort of change it. We can try to adapt with what we got. Try to hide it. They can't hide that can they?
(Tony)

Nadine also differentiated between the 'really disabled' and herself. She then defined the 'really disabled' as people 'in wheelchairs'. David talked about his first visit to the special school. He separates himself from the 'special needs kids' he saw there:

D: I met a few friends, it was quite good. It was a bit errr hard to see special needs kids, how they act 'cos I'm not used to it. I'm used to straight people, brainy people but no T's (special school) all right.
(David)

He accepts that he has special needs ‘a little bit’, but goes on to describe how the pupils in the special school had more special needs than him:

D: It was quite strange at the start, but when you study ’n…
R: What was strange?
D: It’s how they got more special needs than you.
(David)

Interestingly he describes some pupils in the special school as ‘higher’ than him in that their special needs weren’t the needs of a slow learner, but he then puts them below himself in the hierarchy by describing them as ‘putting the class behind’ and ‘stupid. He is referring to pupils with behavioural difficulties.

So these ex-pupils placed themselves at the less disabled end of their hierarchy of special needs. This group, Tim, Barry, David and Tony expressed very little interest in attending mainstream school, they weren’t totally alienated to the idea, but the idea certainly didn’t preoccupy their thoughts. In fact they were very disparaging of mainstream schools, the mainstream staff and the mainstream pupils.

Barry described his mainstream primary school as ‘nasty’. He used to be a bully there and frequently ran away.

Tony said the staff in mainstream school ‘...just wanted an easier life’:

T: .....‘cos they didn’t want me ….‘cos I was a bit slow of learning.
R: Right. Why do you think they didn’t want you because you were slow learning?
T: ……..they couldn’t be bothered they just wanted easier life.
(Tony)

Tim compares himself favourably to some mainstream pupils who called him names.

T: ...they just started picking on me, saying, 'Ayy 'es been to T (name of special school), he's slow, he's a cabbage', 'n all that, right, 'OK I'll show ya.'.
... ...

R: Right. So wha' how did you 'show them'? (laughs)
T: Went to college and got certificates and all that and they didn'....they're still on the streets basically.
(Tim)

David describes mainstream pupils who are in trouble...

D: ....but I think I might 'a' been a more… a rougher person if I was with ND or BE (mainstream secondary schools)…
R: If you'd gone on to go to secondary school?
D: If I went to the same … ye I might 'a' been a violent person, I could have mixed with the wrong sort. There's a few people I know from…. used to go to school with me before I went to T (special school), they have gone down the… down the… down the few drugs dealings and things like that. But I mean in trouble. But I don't know what I would 'a' been if I was… didn't go to T (special school). ……..
(David)

Tony described how he and his friend (David), whom he met at special school, had been discussing how they might have been different had they attended mainstream school:

T: We could a come out to be yobbos, we could 'a come out to be bullies, anything like that. *[Bullies?]* Bullies ye. Are we gonna be stupid as they are? All how they act and things like that.
(Tony)

Tony continues pondering how he might have 'turned out':

T: ...Would I be a nice person like this or…..don't know. If you got in with the wrong people or you might a turned bloody bad. You might 'a' been smoking, might 'a' been different things like that, bullying people, I don't know.
(Tony)

None of this group had been bullied in mainstream school, or if they had it had been very minor. They all identified strongly with the special school. They talked of a sense of belonging, of family, of all being 'in the same boat' and of the importance of being with people the same as you.

David had been talking about the other pupils' reactions to him in mainstream school:

D: ……but it's when they get older they start to look at you and they get bored with you.
R: How do you mean, 'get bored with you'?
D: They see you as t….as you're a bit slow learning and they think you're not with them, not with it. [*Right]* But when I was here (special school) it's people mixing with your own sort, you're fine.
… …
R: What do you mean by, 'your own sort'?
D: People who are in the same boat as you.
(David)

Barry was describing the special school he attended:

B: Well here (special school) it's not just like a school. It's like uh…
T: Family.
B: It's like a family…..family basis. [*Right]* You've got…you have help like when you're at home
(Barry and Tim)

Barry stresses how important it is to be with other people who are 'the same':

B: ...it's just easier for you to go to the special school……. more than go to normal school. Sometimes you get bullied, sometimes you won't. At least in a special school you won't get bullied as much. Least you know you're with the same people...
(Barry)

Though Tony was not typical of this group in that he seems to be saying that it would be best if all pupils could go to one school, he did feel a sense of belonging to the special school because his mother and uncles had been to the same special school. He liked it when staff in the school mistakenly called him by his uncle's name and when staff recognised his family when they went to school events:

T: ... ... it was nice 'cos they knew my uncle, and things like that. That was a nice thing….part of it.
R: When your family had been in school.
T: Ye. And they say, 'Ooh 'allo so and so.' It was actually all right.
(Tony)

In summary, members of this group had the following in common:

- they placed themselves at the top of a hierarchy of special need
- they had a sense of belonging in the special school
- they were disparaging about mainstream schools and pupils
- they preferred to be in the special school and had no strong desire to attend mainstream

This last characteristic: having no desire to attend mainstream school, led me to investigate the group of people who, on the contrary, had expressed regret at not attending mainstream school. How were they reacting to finding themselves in special school?

Wanting to attend mainstream school

Most of this group hadn't realised they were attending a special school for a long time after they had started there. These pupils all said they wished they had been able to go to mainstream school and mostly they were reluctant to admit they attended special school.

Daniel had not realised he was at a special school until he had been there for some time he had not seen himself as a person with a disability:

R: …and you suddenly realised…..
D: …it was a special school.
… …
D: It gradually….
R: …dawned on you as they say?
D: Ye.
… …
R: … … Did you see yourself as a disabled p….person with a disability?
D: No
R: No. But you saw other people in the school with disabilities…….
D: ……..some.
… …
R: Which sort of people stood out to you as disabled people? You thought, 'Ooo that person got a disability. What sort of thing…..?
D: Err like… just say like the way they speak or…..
… …
Errrm…….they need to know where to go
… …
……..just say they… they had to go to classroom….and they couldn't find……
… …
D: Their errrm...their voices … ... ... D: The way they speak.
(Daniel)

Similarly Brian had not realized he was at special school until he had attended there for about three years. Again it is the pupils with Down syndrome who are noticed

first, he describes them as having different difficulties from him. He did not think the special school was the right place for him.

B: I wondered why I came here (special school)…[*Mmm]*…I just didn't … realize until I was ha… half way through college (that he had Aspergers).
… …
B: I just thought it was a normal… well a normal secondary school.
R: Right. When did you realize it was a special school?
B: W… when I saw people with… different difficulties to me like… [*Like…]* Down's syndrome…
… …
B: …….I didn't click on straight away.
… …
B: ……Probably when I was about f… fourteen.
*R: So you'd been here (*special school*) about three years …*
… …
R: … … what do you think a special school is?
B: …… People with learning difficulties……talking difficulties ……..and people who can't write properly.
R: Mmm and how did you fit into that?
B: ……..bit diff… bit difficult.
R: How did you…did you think this was the right place for you?
B: ……*[or not?]* Well I didn't…I thought it wasn't the right place but…
… …
B: Mmm. ……So I was wondering why I was here (special school).
R: Did you ever ask anybody?
B: ……no.
R: And no one told you…….Right. Why do you think you didn't ask?
B: …'Cos it m…. may have sounded like a bit stupid….
(Brian)

Terry had only ever attended special school, he had been there for several years before he realised it was a special school and then he was embarrassed to tell people he went there. He really wanted to be in a mainstream school, he didn't identify with the special school.

T: I think errr I was getting into year…….seven, year eight *[Right]* year eight and errm I felt like errr well a p… a fellow student went off to a junior school and I felt at the time possibly it was … well I feel like, I f…felt like could have had the opportunity to go on to a junior school and possibly a mainstream school which one tutor told me that I possibly had the potential I could of.
… …

… …
T: Errrm……it wouldn't have s……it came as a bit of a sh… bit of a surprise, but I …I …personally I think I would…I wouldn't have been surprised if I could have coped…coped at a mainstream school. I probably could of.
… …
… if I had the opportunity to go there and give it a try, I would have….would have done.
… …
I think I should have gone about eleven or twelve.
… …
T: I felt I wanted to give it a try and that. I wanted to see what I could do outside T (special school) and that.
… …
I had a few neighbours that went to mainstream school 'nd…
… …
I played with them ye.
R: Did they ever ask you where you went to school, can you remember?
T: Yes but I tended to avoid the issue.
… …
T: Errm I didn't wanna tell 'em really.
R: Why's that?
T: 'Cos I felt … felt a bit errm… a bit embarrassed, that's all.
(Terry)

Maria had wondered why she had been sent to special school, though she realised later it was for her reading and writing. She recognised that the extra attention she had received at the special school had made her happier than she had been in mainstream primary school; even so, she had wanted to be in mainstream school and was embarrassed to admit she went to special school.

Kirk was asked what he said when his mates or work colleagues asked him where he went to school:

K: I normally say it's a special school or just say it's a school in (indistinguishable) next to Q (nearby secondary mainstream school).
R: Right. Right. And do they…do they wonder why…do they say, 'What d' you go there for?' or anything?
K: Err…Not particularly but then sometimes I do say but they don't believe me, they…'cos they think I'm pretty normal (laughs) most of the time.

… …

R: So you've never sort of pretended you didn't go to special school? 'Cos some people say to me …
K: Sometimes I have pretended but… *[Wh.. that you…]* That's because I just wondered how it would react, 'cos errrm…..'cos you've got B (mainstream secondary school) and C (another secondary school), everyone's heard of them, the others… usually when I say T (special school) no one knows where it is. *[Right]* But…
*R: So what… so when you pretend that you haven't been here (*special school*), where do you say you've been?...B (*secondary mainstream school*) or…?*
K: B usually.
R: Right and does it…do they ever question that and say anything?
K: ……errm not all the time.
R: Mmm. So but normally you do that just for a bit of fun are you saying, rather than just because you get fed up of them not knowing where it is?
K: Ye mostly.
R: Or is it because you don't want to own up to going to special school?
K: It's half 'n half really.

… …

K: ……Well I liked T (special school) but since errm I haven't really tried … can't remember any other schools I wouldn't mind try…seeing what it… other schools would be like 'cos … say if you're from B (mainstream secondary school), 'cos it's like a local one everyone knows each other, you'd be more errm…not popular but more people would know where you come from.
R: Right. So…do you see that as a good thing….Err as one of the sort of bad things about having gone to special school, that you don't know so many people, is that what you're saying or n…
K: Ye I sayin…well it's probably 'cos I'm on X (housing estate) it's like people round X don't know me.[*Mmm]* So I don't really...like if you've been from the same school you've grown up together aren't you …it's like say if…say me….I guess if I'd have been in E (area where special school is) it's OK 'cos then the school's round here isn't it, 'cos everyone would know where it is
(Kirk)

Kirk seems to wish he could have gone to mainstream school, he wanted to be part of the neighbourhood youth scene, he admits that sometimes he says he went to the local mainstream school though he rationalises that this was partly because they have never heard of the special school. Interestingly he introduces the idea of other people thinking he's 'pretty normal' and that's why they query his going to a special school, he may be questioning the legitimacy of his placement in special school.

Naomi is diffident when asked if she admits to people that she attended a special school but does admit that she would have preferred to go to mainstream school.

Despite their undeniable affection for the special school, this group wished they could have attended mainstream school. These ex-pupils: Brian, Daniel, Kirk, Maria, Naomi and Terry had the following characteristics in common:

- they didn't engage in positioning themselves on the hierarchy of special needs, though they did mention that they needed help with some subjects
- they regretted not attending mainstream school
- they denigrated neither mainstream schools nor the pupils in them. Though Daniel does talk of pupils in mainstream school thinking they are smarter
- they were embarrassed to admit that they had attended special school
- they didn't identify with needing to be at the special school

Agency

This final characteristic: not identifying with needing to attend special school, led me to investigate another theme that had emerged about 'agency'. I wondered, since they thought they were wrongly placed in the special school, what part, if any, the members of this group had played in the decision for them to be there.

In fact none of this group recalled being consulted about going to special school. Those that remembered (Brian, Maria, Naomi) were 'told' they were going to special

school and none of them were clear why. Of the others (Daniel, Terry, Kirk, Naomi) who didn't remember starting at the special school, Daniel and Terry together with Brian didn't realize they were in a special school until much later on.

This contrasted with the other group. Tim, Barry and David all felt they had had a choice as to whether they went to mainstream or special school, and though from their descriptions it was clear that the staff in the mainstream school had thought special school would be advisable, they were quite sure that the choice had been theirs. Barry made his choice of which school to go to aged eleven and explains that he chose special school because he wanted to be in a class where he did the same work as everyone else.

R: ...Did you feel you had any choice or...?
B: Yeah I 'ad a choice.
*R: To go where? I (*special school other than the one he attended*), here* (special school attended*) or…D (*mainstream secondary school*)?*
B: Uh…D (mainstream secondary school).
*R: And were you…was that gonna be the same for you at D (*secondary mainstream school*)? Would you have been in a special class…*
B: Yeah.
R: Or would you have been with your other friends?
B: I thought make it easier on myself...learn the same stuff as everyone else, *[Right]* instead of putting you down a lesson. It's not right.
(Barry)

Similarly Tim felt he had a choice and he chose special school for very similar reasons. For David going to special school was a shared decision between him and his Mum. He had explained that he was happy at mainstream junior school:

R: …what were you thinking when you were eleven about what mainstream secondary school would be like?
D: I just see how the people were, when they were coming out of school, how think they're tough and stupid 'n…

R: Even then you saw that…
D: Ye. *[Ye]* My Mum didn't want me to t…my Mum didn't want me to be like them...being s… in drugs 'n keeping police coming round all the time.
*R: Right. So you were happy to come here (*special school*) and your Mum was happy for you to come...?*
D: Ye.
(David)

These two groups did not include six pupils.

A group who identified totally with the special school

These six had no desire to attend mainstream school, but neither, did they engage in positioning themselves on a hierarchy of special needs, nor, (with perhaps the exception of Mizzie), in denigrating mainstream schools or the pupils that attended them.

The six pupils who did not fit either of the other groups were Amy, Bella, Diane, Hannah, Mizzie and Tracey, they too had features in common:

- they were all female
- they identified strongly with the special school
- they had all been bullied, sometimes quite extensively either whilst in mainstream school or by mainstream school pupils outside of school
- none of them, (except Tracey who thought the swimming might be better there), expressed any desire to attend mainstream school, indeed they were mostly vehemently opposed to the idea
- they wanted to be in special school

Also, with the single exception of Amy, they attached no stigma to attending the special school, they were very open about where they went to school; indeed Mizzie recommended it to friends.

Although Amy is the exception here, her comments are worthy of note, (not least for reasons of intellectual honesty). When asked if she was ashamed of having attended special school she said... 'sort of', she felt...'a bit uncomfortable' about telling people.

A: Friends still ask me now... I just don't like telling them... I just make up another school [*because*] because I don't think they'd talk to me again or they wouldn't like hang around.
R: Why not?
A: Because it's a special school [*and*] they sometimes think that you're a bit funny... like a bit slow at things 'n like doing the work and.....
R: What would be a good word?
A: ... Like I'm with my friends I'm ashamed to tell them
(Amy)

However I propose that this group saw the special school as a haven.

Hannah couldn't 'take the risk' of going to secondary mainstream school and the bullying 'starting up again'. Amy knew she wouldn't cope in mainstream school 'because of the bullying' and Mizzie thought she would be dead had she attended secondary mainstream school. I had asked her whether she thought she was bullied because she attended special school:

R: Do you think if you'd gone to mainstream school you wouldn't have got bullied?
M: Errm I think it would probably have got worse. Lot worse than… I'd probably have been dead actually.
(Mizzie)

Bella, though not overly concerned about bullying, (though she had experienced people being nasty to her in mainstream school), described the special school as keeping her ‘safe’ and thought they wouldn’t like her in mainstream school. It was Bella who had meticulously drawn a perimeter fence and included other safety features in her drawing of special school.

Diane had been bullied in both mainstream and special school and, in fact, said she was bullied more in the **special** school. However when I asked her what she would ask a fairy godmother for she said...

D: .....come… send me back here (special school)…….
(Diane)

Later she likened the special school to ‘a big family’. Tracey explained how the name calling in mainstream affected her, it made her, unhappy and unstable and that she was ‘really happy’ to have attended special school.

Subjectively I judged that four of this group, Amy, Bella, Diane and Tracey were immature relative to the other interviewees, as observation of their drawings/word lists seemed to indicate (See Appendix 27). From my knowledge of them as pupils the same four were intellectually, relatively the lowest achievers of all the interviewees, however Hannah and Mizzie do not fit this description.

I believe it is significant that the individuals in this group are all female but this is a line I do not intend pursuing here.

Outliers

Four of the interviewed ex-pupils did not seem to fit easily into any of these groups. Ewan only attended for the first interview, he declined the invitation to any further meetings so he did not complete the sorting, ranking or drawing exercises. Analysis of his transcript revealed several anomalies, i.e. there are several inconsistent statements. This may have been due to the presence of his sister- he does tend to change his mind when she questions something, as he did when I questioned a response:

R: ...how do you think your life would have been different if you'd gone to mainstream school? ... You know to big school?
E: Ye…….errr ……..
R: How would things have been different for you?
E: ……..been a lot different.
(Ewan)

But then:

*R: So wh how...do you think things would have been different if you'd gone there (*mainstream school*)?*
E: ……..errrm….no I don't think so, no.
R: No? You think it would have been just the same?
E: Ye.
(Ewan)

Though I have quoted from his transcript elsewhere in this work I do think its reliability as to whether it represents what he truly felt is questionable.

Nadine seems to occupy a position between the first group, who wanted to attend mainstream school, and the second group, who identified with the special school but put themselves at the top of the hierarchy. She joins with this latter group in denigrating the mainstream pupils and talks about the 'really disabled' in contrast to

herself, but she then expresses her disappointment at not going to mainstream and wonders whether there were plans for her to go there. She vacillates between the two positions. She seems to be troubled in this position, her transcript demonstrates this trouble, she questions me about bringing up her own children, something she worries about, and she is still getting bullied. My personal knowledge of Nadine confirms that she is indeed a troubled person.

Simon seems also to straddle the first two groups. Like those in the second group he does position himself above others in the 'special needs hierarchy' and, to some extent, he does denigrate the mainstream primary school he attended; in a similar way to Daniel, he says how ex-mainstream pupils think they're smarter but they are not really. However his transcript shows evidence of being ashamed of going to special school and he says quite emphatically that he would choose mainstream school if he had his time over again.

So Simon displays characteristics of both groups. It is not easy to account for his position within this explanation. Maybe like Nadine he is in a 'troubled' position though there was no evidence of this. There were some inconsistencies in his transcript, he struggled to give a clear description of what format he would like his schooling to be if he had his time over again but eventually said mainstream until thirteen years of age and then special school to eighteen. This was an unusual stance and I wonder if Simon was really clear on this matter.

Darren also, at first sight, occupies an anomalous position. He identified totally with the special school. His transcript shows no evidence of him ever wanting to attend another school, he was never bullied, he does not engage in ‘running down’ other schools nor does he position himself on a hierarchy of special needs. My personal knowledge of him is that he was a relatively academically able pupil. I will discuss his position in terms of social identity below.

CHAPTER 5
PUTING FINDINGS INTO CONTEXT AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I will discuss the overall findings of the work and examine them particularly in the context of the literature, reviewed in Chapter 2, around the four themes: history of special education provision, accessing the views of young people labelled as having learning difficulties, prior research and Social Identity Theory. I will then describe some of the implications of the findings and make some recommendations for policy and practice. The limitations of the methods used will be considered. I will make some recommendations for future research, describe how the work has already been disseminated, and describe some opportunities for publication arising from it that I feel can contribute to and extend the current knowledge in the field. Finally I will revisit and address each aspect of the research question posed in Chapter 1.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Placing the work in historical context

The missing voices in the history of special education 1870-1990 described in Chapter 2, (See Winzer 1993, Swain 2005 and Van Drenth, 2005 for accounts of the neglect of the perspectives of those who were subjected to the practices of special education), were those of the pupils. This work, though it does describe the legislation and guidance under which schools operated up to and including the time when the ex-

pupils in this study were starting school, will not contribute to a 'traditional history' (see p.8 for my understanding of this term) of special schools. Rather it does provide some evidence of what it was like to attend a special school during the closing years of the twentieth century from the pupils' own perspectives, i.e. it contributes to the 'history of consumption' (Myers and Brown 2005).

When these ex-pupils attended school the 1981, 1988 and 1993 Education Acts had been enacted. The 1981 Act stated that children should be educated in mainstream schools if that was compatible with: '-(a) his (sic) receiving the special educational provision that he requires; (b) the provision of efficient education for the children with whom he (sic) will be educated ; and (c) the efficient use of resources' and it stipulated that: 'account has been taken,... ...of the views of the child's parent' (Education Act 1981 section 2 p.2). I quote directly from the Act because a) it illustrates my conclusion at the end of chapter 2 that the history of special education is a compromise between altruism, pragmatism and economic restraints, and b) it legislates for the consideration of the views of the parent **but not** of the pupil.

The 1988 Act (Education Reform Act 1988) introduced the statutory national curriculum. This will have impinged on all the ex-pupils in this work, including those who were by that time in special school, because it was mandatory in all, including special, schools. However the 1988 Act also introduced statutory testing, formula funding and league tables, and for those ex-pupils in this study who were in mainstream schools at this time it meant that their schools were exposed to market forces. The ex-pupils in mainstream at this time spoke frequently about not getting the help with learning that they felt they needed (see p.161). It could be that the

respondents in this work found themselves eventually in special school because of the consequent increase in the number of pupils identified as having SEN (Lunt 2007 p.105).

The 1993 Act introduced the Code of Practice which provided practical guidance to LEAs and school governing bodies on their responsibilities towards pupils with SEN (Education Act 1993 168: 1). Whilst it did not influence some of the older respondents in this work in that they were already in special school, perhaps it did benefit the younger ones in that it raised the profile of special needs in mainstream schools and, possibly as a result, some of the younger ex-pupils report that they were given extra support in mainstream school, probably in the hope of maintaining their place there. Whilst the 1993 Act did allow for the views of parents to be considered (Education Act 1993 168: 1) in the process of writing a 'statement of special educational need', it did not make it mandatory to take account of the views of the pupil, though this was subsequently rectified by the Code of Practice (DfES 2001) resulting from the 1996 Education Act which purported to place...

> '... the rights of children with special educational needs at the heart of the process, allowing them to be heard and to take part in decisions about their education.'
> (DfES 2001 p.ii)

Despite this legislation, Norwich (2006) found that several years later, there were still... '...many perceived barriers to eliciting [SEN] pupils' views, consulting with them and negotiating over decisions affecting them.' Anyway this legislation was too

late to ensure that the respondents in this work were consulted about their wishes in relation to their own school placement.

5.1.2 Accessing the views of young people labelled as having learning difficulties

Notwithstanding the fact that young people's rights, including the rights of those labelled as having learning difficulties, to contribute, participate, be heard and have their views acted upon have been codified by convention, law or code of practice for some time, (see pp14/15 for references to legislation and codification in this area), certainly since these ex-pupils were in full-time education, this work seems to provide evidence, that they were still being sometimes ignored: at least seven of the twenty ex-pupils believed that they were not consulted about going to special school and also reported that they would have liked to go to mainstream school but the opportunity to express their wishes didn't arise. Yet this work also evidences the unique contribution that they are in fact able to make.

With reference to Lindsay's work on why we should be interested in accessing the views of young people (Lindsay 2004 pp 195-6), the ex-pupils in this work should have been heard because it was their right. I would argue that it is also a matter of justice, (if justice is to do with fairness and reasonableness in the way people are treated), which can be evidenced by the ex-pupils' reports that placing some of them in special school was done without their knowledge and was actually against their subsequent wishes. Whether there were more pragmatic reasons for accessing their perspectives is a little more contentious. Had their views been solicited and acted upon, then some of them would not have attended special school, and though it is not

possible to say how they would have fared, possibly they would have not experienced the stigma which they attached to having attended special school.

In a study which accessed the voice of pupils labelled as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), Sellman (2009) wrote that...

> 'The key point to take from this study is that students who perhaps would not normally be given the opportunity to engage in pupil empowerment and student voice projects have demonstrated their capability to engage with such processes, and when asked have extremely important messages.
> (Sellman 2009 p. 45)

I make a similar observation in this work: of equal importance with what the ex-pupils had to say, was the fact that they demonstrated that they were able to say it. However we cannot expect young people to suddenly become proficient in expressing their views in, for example, the year nine transition meeting, if they have never been consulted before. Byers (2008 p.42) discovered, when doing action research with mainstream secondary school and college students labelled as having learning difficulties, that many of the young people when asked what was important to them had little confidence...

> '...this was often because the young people had not had enough experience of being asked...'
> (Byers 2008 p.42)

Even so, the young people involved in this work were able to give an authentic (see discussion on authenticity of responses below), useful, and sometimes impressive account of their perspective on attending special school.

5.1.3 The use of participant drawings as a method

The use of drawings was particularly useful in extending data, (as in Tony's drawing of the pupils in 'bubbles protecting them from the outside world') and for checking reliability, (as in Bella's talk of 'being safe' in interview and then drawing a fence around the special school 'to keep pupils safe' ten months later). Drawings were suggested by Clark and Moss (2001) as a means of 'communicating ideas and feelings to adults' (p.6). Though Clark and Moss's work was with early years, mainstream school pupils, Haney et al (2004) reported on work with mainstream middle school pupils, including work using drawings very successfully with pupils labelled as having learning difficulties. They used student drawings as a tool of educational research in both large-scale and classroom-based action research. They point out that ... '... drawings have been little recognized as a medium of educational research in recent decades.' They concluded from their own work, that...

> 'Student drawings provide a rich opportunity to document students' perspectives and to transcend assumptions and artifice regarding what is going on in classrooms.'
> (Haney et al 2004 p. 267)

They found that drawings could 'yield reliable and valid evidence' (p.267). However they do describe how older pupils can be reluctant to draw because they believe they are unable to (p.268). It was for this reason that in this work I allowed ex-pupils the option of writing word lists, an option which several chose. The word lists they produced were as useful in extending the data as the drawings had been. I believe that offering this choice is a method that could be useful with adults and younger people, without threatening the dignity of either, those who like drawing and find it an easy

way to communicate, those who feel they cannot draw or those who feel drawing is 'childish'.

5.1.4 A discussion of the findings in the context of similar research

In line with other similar research reviewed in Chapter 2 this work reveals the generally positive view of the special school which the ex-pupils held. Similarly it exposes some of the negative aspects which some of them perceived and certainly this exposed a group of the ex-pupils in this study to a dilemma similar to that described by Norwich (1997).

An appropriate curriculum and appropriate support

Participants in this work agreed with the findings in prior work (Jahnukainen 2001, Farrell and Polat 2003, Preece and Timmins 2004, Sheldon 1991), that small class sizes were a positive feature of special schools (see pp 161-6 for ex-pupils' views on pupil: teacher ratios in mainstream settings), and with Wise and Upton (1998) that there are psychological demands on pupils associated with being in a 'daunting' large school which necessitates moving from class to class and finding one's way around (see pp 170-3).

The quality of teachers

Prior papers identified that pupils felt that the special school teachers had special qualities. They spoke of fairness and mutually respectful relationships (Sheldon 1991, Cooper 1993, Wise and Upton 1998, Jahnukainen 2001, Farrell and Polat 2003, Smith et al 2004, Preece and Timmins 2004), which are mirrored in this research (see pp 167-8) as is the valuing of the teacher's sense of fun (see pp168-9).

A special ethos

The special ethos of the special school which participants recognised in previous studies was also recognised by the ex-pupils in this work. Likening special provision to a family, a place where one could feel safe and where pupils felt they belonged (Allan and Brown 2001, Farrell and Polat 2003) were recurring descriptions used by participants here (see pp 166-7).

The dilemma

Norwich (1997) writes of the dilemma for pupils who recognise the benefits of special school but also understand the 'devalued identity' associated with attending such an institution. In this work, the majority of ex-pupils' responses did not indicate that they felt stigmatised by attending a special school. All participants in this study

invariably expressed great affection for the special school but a group of them certainly found themselves in a dilemmatic position. The dilemma for them was that they believed they were wrongly placed in the special school, they had had no input in the decision for them to be there and there was no forum in which they felt they could subsequently, comfortably express their desire to attend mainstream school. For this latter group there certainly was a degree of shame associated with admitting that they had attended special school (see pp 199-203). Other participants identified closely with the special school and had coped with the possibility of an associated devalued identity by denigrating mainstream schools, their pupils and their staff (see below for an explanation of this behaviour in the context of social identity theory).

Other negative aspects

In Norwich and Kelly's (2004) study, primary special school pupils reported more bullying by mainstream school pupils than did similar pupils in mainstream. The ex-pupils in this study did not highlight bullying as a priority concern and very few of them had experienced firsthand bullying within their mainstream primary schools, though their perception of secondary mainstream schools, which none of them had attended, was that bullying was rife within them. Three participants referred to bullying from peers outside school and/or within their neighbourhoods and for one ex-pupil this was very serious, involving the police, though interestingly only one associated the bullying with their attending a special school.

Where pupils in this study made reference to peers in their neighbourhood they usually described their isolation from other young people there and this resonates with the findings of other research (Tisdall and Dawson 1994), however, often participants in this work and in the work of others, (Hallett et al 2007) referred to valued friendships made in special school and maintained long into adulthood.

The restrictions of special provision

Participants mostly described the appropriate nature of both content and method of delivery of the curriculum in special school in contrast with what they had experienced in mainstream (see pp 156-60) and this is in accord with the findings of research in similar institutions (Wise and Uppton 1998, Allan and Brown 2001, Farrell and Polat 2003). There is one reference to the restricted curriculum of the special school (see p174) which has similarities with the findings of Tisdall and Dawson (1994) and Jahnukainen (2001), but there are a number of other references within this work to the participants' experience of relatively less freedom in the special school (see pp138-41), mostly connected with not being allowed off site and being transported to and from school.

So similarities and contrasts can be identified when comparing this work with similar prior research. However I am unaware of research which attempts to understand these findings in a context of social identity theory.

5.1.5 Understanding the findings within a framework of Social Identity Theory

In what I believe is an innovative explication of the way the ex-pupils reacted to finding themselves in special school, I will describe how their reactions mostly took one of three forms. I propose that of these three forms, one was a typical, (in Social Identity Theory terms), response to preserving self-esteem, one was a response to being categorised against one's will, and the third an even more basic response to survival, and that in part they can be understood within the framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT) as discussed in Chapter 2.

To explain the ex-pupils' responses in a SIT framework requires that they understood both that they were categorised as having learning difficulties and that society perceives this as a low status group. All the participants recognised that they were in a special school, though this recognition may in some cases have taken several years, and they were all able to express a reason why they were there. They may not have used the terms learning difficulties or disabilities, though some did, but their various reasons (as collected in Table 18) for being in special school all included a description of some deficiency within themselves which hindered learning. Over half (11) of the participants used the word 'normal' either to contrast mainstream schools with the special school they attended or to contrast themselves with other pupils who did not attend special school. So these ex-pupils mostly perceived that they were different, not normal, and that this difference was to do with some deficiency which was intrinsic to them. This would imply that they recognised the relative low status of

their group. On this basis I will proceed to explaining their reactions to their special school placement in terms of SIT.

The group whose individual members said that they wanted to attend mainstream school did not identify with having learning difficulties. None of them recalled being consulted about attending the special school; they had certainly not chosen to be in the special school and didn't believe they needed to be there (see pp 203-4 for evidence of lack of agency in the decision for the individuals in this group to be placed in special school). They were embarrassed to admit they attended special school and rarely said anything derogatory about mainstream schools or mainstream pupils. They all expressed regret at not attending mainstream school (see pp 199-203).

So how can their behaviour be understood within a SIT framework? SIT predicts that if the individual believes the boundaries are illegitimate, (as well as impermeable), then they will opt for raising the status of their own group by undermining the status of the higher status group. If they perceive that the boundaries are legitimate (as well as impermeable), they will attempt to find another characteristic of the group which compares favourably with higher status groups, hence enabling the members of the group to derive self-esteem (Hogg and Abrams 1988). Members of this group found that the barriers to them attending mainstream school were in fact impermeable; they found that though they wanted to attend mainstream school they couldn't (see pp 199-203 for evidence of wanting to attend mainstream school). However they took neither of the available options, described by SIT to preserve their self-esteem. They neither undermined the status of mainstream staff or pupils nor attempted to make a

favourable comparison of features of their special school placement with the mainstream school. So how can their behaviour be understood?

Branscombe et al (1999) describe 'being categorised against one's will' as 'categorization threat' (p.36). They describe the dangers of this:

> 'To the extent that people feel they are treated unjustly as a result of such inappropriate categorization, they are not only likely to express anger, but they may also suffer from lowered self-esteem.'
> Branscombe et al 1999 p.40)

It is my thesis that this group may be particularly vulnerable to expressing anger and lowered self-esteem. This is ironic when we consider that one of this group, Kirk, thought he came to special school because he had a behaviour problem, he used to get angry easily at home (see Table 18, p.192) and also ironic in view of the probable already low self-esteem of these pupils (see Appendix 28, Sullivan (1999) unpublished Masters dissertation findings on the self-esteem of pupils in the special school that these participants attended).

The second group identified strongly with the special school (see p.189 for evidence of ex-pupils in this group identifying strongly with the special school). They had mostly been consulted and felt they had chosen to be in the special school (see pp 198-200 for evidence of this group of ex-pupils' agency in the decision for them to attend special school) and they had a very strong sense of belonging there (see p.197-8 for evidence of a sense of belonging in this group). So finding themselves in this low-status group how did they protect or raise their self-esteem? It seems they

employed some social change methods. They had tried mainstream school and for various reasons hadn't been able to cope there. This was their impermeable barrier. They couldn't exist in that group in any way that met their learning needs and even less their psychological needs. So finding themselves in a group that they had little alternative but to inhabit, they raised the status of their group by denigrating the mainstream schools, their teachers and particularly the pupils that attended them (see pp195-7 for evidence of ex-pupils denigrating mainstream schools). They then positioned themselves near the top of their own group or rather they put others below them see (pp193-5 for evidence of ex-pupils positioning themselves near the top of a hierarchy of special needs). I have not found reference to this latter method of preserving self-esteem in the SIT literature, (though I have found reference to members of stigmatised groups making in-group rather than out-group social comparisons in order to protect their self-esteem in Crocker et al (1989) and there is evidence in Watson et al (1999) of pupils labelled as disabled engaging in describing hierarchies of disability (p19)), but it seems to be how this group coped with their assigned low-status.

The third group did not adopt any of the three methods: social mobility, social change nor social creativity described by SIT in an attempt to salvage their self-esteem. So how can we understand this?

It is possible that at least some of this group may not have understood that they were in a low status group, (a necessary prerequisite to responses within SIT), and the implications of this categorisation; however, the evidence does not support this. Hannah spoke of other people's prejudice against people with disability, she had

experienced such prejudice herself and she had attended mainstream school (p.134). She was also academically relatively able within the special school and had gone on to secure full time, long term employment. It is unlikely that she was unaware of the status implications of attending the special school. Mizzie was very similar to Hannah and also spoke of people's prejudice (p.149). She and Amy had spoken about normality and contrasted their position with it. It is possible that Tracey and Diane were in the position of not understanding the low status of the group, for neither of them raised the concept of normality neither were they academically relatively able within the special school, however, Tracey did recognise that she moved to special school because people were nasty to her in the mainstream school because she was slower than them (p.147), and she could identify her learning difficulties (see Table 18). Diane gave an account of her learning difficulties, '….. I was born like with special needs learning difficulties', and how she came to have them, '...half of my brain works 'n the other one doesn't. ... ... It makes me a bit slower. ... ... I had a cord round my neck when I was born.', and she knew she went to special school because of these difficulties; '...That's probably why I joined here.' It therefore seems unlikely that even Tracey and Diane were ignorant of their position.

I suggest that members of this group were concerned with something even more basic than preserving their self-esteem, that is, self-preservation. According to Maslow's (Maslow 1954) hierarchy of motivations (see p.26), the motivation for safety must be more or less satisfied before self-esteem needs are required to be met. We have seen the evidence that members of this group felt vulnerable to, bullying (p.147), the physical design of mainstream school (p.170) and the world outside the school (p.141 and drawings 2 and 3). The highly structured nature of the special school met their

need for ‘uncertainty reduction’ which was most acute in this more vulnerable group (Hogg and Mullin 1999 p.253).

What of the ‘outliers’? Can their behaviour be accounted for within this framework? The behaviour of two of them, Nadine and Simon, is more typical of the ‘social change’ course of action available to those who find the barriers to ‘upward mobility’ impermeable (Tajfel 1974 p.82), in that they denigrated mainstream schools and pupils (see pp 195-7) thus putting their special school in a superior position and interestingly, like members of the second group they placed themselves high on a hierarchy of learning difficulties (see pp 193-5). However they are untypical in that Nadine certainly aspired to attend the mainstream school (see p.139) and Simon is not clear as to his preference for either special or mainstream school (see Appendix 29: an excerpt from Simon’s interview transcript).

Darren was a popular, relatively academically successful pupil, surrounded at home by siblings all of whom attended special school and a member of a close knit, supportive family. He was also successful in sporting activities and craft lessons and, as he talks of with great affection, he took the lead role in drama productions at special school (see p.158). He went on the win a prize at college after competing with pupils from mainstream schools. Life appears to have been good for Darren. Perhaps set against all this success, being categorised with a low status group was relatively unimportant to Darren. Special school was what he knew and enjoyed, he was unlikely to take the gamble of swapping it for the unknown and increased uncertainty.

I propose that SIT helps to understand the special school ex-pupils' responses to being placed in special school and that this knowledge will be useful, both in informing policy and practice (see section 5.2) and further research (see section 5.4)

5.2 Implications of findings for policy and practice

5.2.1 Accessing the pupil's perspective

An understanding of the pupil's perspective on their own school placement is essential if we do not want to run the risk of jeopardising their education and psychological well-being. Those in authority need to know to what extent the pupil identifies with the group in which they are placed. They need to know what the motivations for the pupil are, whether they feel physically or emotionally threatened or whether they perceive that their placement is unjust. The perspective of the pupil is unique, vital and paramount in contributing to this decision.

Thomas and Loxley argue that an inclusive society...

> '... demands an active response in education. Such a response, while patchy, clearly already exists in schools... ... further moves in this direction depend on an active espousal of certain ideas by educators, to do not only with financing and redistribution, but also to do with **recognition, respect and listening to the voices of those who have been through special education.'**
> (Thomas and Loxley 2007 p.130 emphasis added)

I hope that this work is recognised as a ‘move in this direction’. Not only does it listen to ‘those who have been through special education’ but it highlights what happens when we do not listen to those who are experiencing special education.

5.2.2 An appropriate environment for learning

Some ex-pupils felt that whereas they had not learnt in mainstream school (p.136), they had made academic progress in special school (p.156). It was not therefore that these pupils could not learn, rather the environment had not been conducive to learning in the mainstream school. The findings indicated several aspects of the learning environment which needed addressing.

First, there was too little accessible help in the classroom (see p.161). This was the overwhelming message from the ex-pupils: it was the defining difference between mainstream and special schools (p.162). Staff in mainstream did not seem to have enough time to dedicate totally to pupils. Ex-pupils often described them as distracted; they seemed to be pre-occupied with business other than direct involvement with pupils. The ex-pupils spoke of being told to ‘get on with it’ on their own, of not being given the time to finish work on their own, or being told they could ‘finish it off later’ (p.163). Classes were large and pupils were left waiting for support which sometimes never came, or when it did, it was of inadequate quality. Second, they felt that work was inappropriate (p.136), too difficult, and there was too much pressure from expectations of work to be completed and deadlines to be met, whereas they appeared to be stimulated by practical activities, educational visits and residential

experiences (p.160). Thirdly, some ex-pupils suggested that methods used in the special school made learning more accessible for them (p.137). Addressing each of these three aspects of the learning environment may enhance inclusion in mainstream schools. Fourthly, the ex-pupils talked about other aspects of the special schools which collectively would seem to contribute to reducing stress in the learning environment. These include: staff who have time to listen and care (p.162), time to have fun (p.168), and an optimally sized community where buildings and spaces within were of appropriate scale (p.170).

If we are to continue with separate provision in special schools this work also makes some recommendations for making them more inclusive.

As discussed above (p.154) the ex-pupils had very little experience of secondary mainstream schools, either first-hand or even second-hand in some cases. This ignorance may contribute to fear of the unknown and ultimately prejudice; I believe there is some evidence of this in the responses above (see p.150-1 for Tony's and David's ideas of what mainstream secondary school is like). It may be that this prejudice can be reduced by increasing familiarity between the two school populations, via steps such as co-location of mainstream and special schools, shared placements and joint activities.

Examinations should be similar to those taken in mainstream schools so that there is a common understanding between pupils from both types of provision (p.138). This may mean either school adapting, but there are exams which can accommodate a large range of ability.

Special schools may need to become less restrictive environments (p.139). Calculated risk assessments need to be made, but they must maximise opportunities for freedom and independent behaviour.

5.2.3 Implications for method

The fact that I, the researcher was relatively well known to the participants, having taught them, or at least been a teacher in the school they attended could be a criticism of the work. Whereas I propose that it was a distinct advantage and would recommend it as a method to be used in research of this type.

I felt that knowing the ex-pupils meant that I could make fine judgements during the interview process. I could assess when pupils might be getting stressed, I knew details of their families, which meant that we could chat informally and which relaxed us both. Though I had been an authority figure I felt that they could be more relaxed with me than with someone whom they had not met before and who would anyway also be in authority by virtue of the researcher: researched power imbalance alone. I knew how they communicated, e.g. who normally waited before they replied, who normally spoke in a very quiet voice and for whom these were signs of stress. I also believe that they knew that they could trust me. These advantages outweighed any possible disadvantages such as the likelihood of acquiescence (Lewis 2002), (see discussion around possibility of acquiescence p.68).

5.3 Specific Limitations

This is a phenomenological study, it aims to 'illuminate human phenomena' (Hycner 1985). This phenomenon could not have been sensibly researched using natural science methods. It is not meaningful to subject it to the tests of the natural science method such as: what the hypothesis was, whether variables were controlled for, whether the sample was representative and its size adequate, whether its findings can be generalised to other situations, (whilst the findings should be of interest and worthy of consideration by those who make decisions about educational provision, they should not be taken to represent what all pupils in all special schools perceive about their schooling), and whether they can be replicated. Control groups, standardised questionnaires and disinterested researchers and analysts could neither have discovered nor described the subtleties revealed by the phenomenological approach. Indeed it is the essential subjectivity of this approach which gives it its strength.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

I will restrict myself to describing work that I feel would be useful as a contribution to transformative research for those labelled as having learning difficulties, and which would be attractive to me as a researcher in that field.

1. This research highlights how some pupils who attended the special school did not tell adults how they felt about being at special school. There could be many reasons for this, but it is important that pupils who have something to

say are able to say it and know that what they say will be taken into account. I am particularly interested in how teachers can be supported in a) recognising, valuing and accessing pupils' views and b) designing systems throughout schools that do this authentically and consistently. I envisage that action research methods involving pupils, school staff and professional researcher/s would be a way forward. Although the case studies in the 'What About Us Project?' (Byers et al 2008) are an elegant example of promoting inclusion, they highlighted the fact that pupils were not used to being consulted and sometimes had to learn how to have a view and then how to express it. I believe that teachers need to be encouraged to seek the views of pupils from a very early age, especially from those pupils with whom the staff have difficulties communicating. My feeling is that this needs to start with the commencement of compulsory schooling, at the latest. I would be interested in working within schools, on action research projects aimed at investigating methods that could be used from this early age.

2. Though the ex-pupils in this work were sometimes asked how their lives would have been different had they attended mainstream schools, it did not consider in much detail how they felt attending special school had impacted on their lives since leaving school. Such research would surely make a crucial contribution to the debate around inclusion. I envisage that very similar methods to those used in this work could be combined with group interview work. The group interview work, I feel, and as suggested by Lewis (1992), would enhance the breadth and depth of responses because of interaction

between participants, and would also provide support to the more reticent respondents. The participants in this work, who as a result of this work have formed a small group with the aim of organising a reunion of ex-pupils of the special school, may be willing to form a core group of participants, with others from a greater age range joining the group. The participants in such work may be interested in having more input regards methods and possibly setting their own agenda for research. Such research could have a lasting legacy of founding a group of adults who attended special school and provide opportunities for socialising and self-support.

3. The findings of this work indicate that there is work to be done around investigating the reactions of pupils placed in special schools. I am particularly concerned for the group who felt they had no agency in the decision to place them in special school and expressed a desire to have been in a mainstream school. I would be interested first in investigating whether there are pupils currently in special schools in a similar position. Given the evidence from this work a simple questionnaire could be designed to initially identify pupils who may fall within this potentially vulnerable group. They could then be invited to participate in semi-structured interview to ascertain more precisely their reaction to their placement. Professionals need to be aware if there are pupils in schools who are at risk of anger outbursts and depression merely because of their placement in the special school.

5.5 Dissemination

Besides the production and sharing of a participant's copy of the findings of this work (Appendix 22), the work has been disseminated via publication and presentation. Whilst I was reflecting on whether a non-disabled researcher could or should research disability I produced a paper on that topic for the Psychology of Education Review (Sullivan 2006).

I presented a paper summarising the work thus far at the Birmingham University Research Student Conference in June 2008 and in February 2010 I presented a similar report to The Birmingham University School of Education 'Research in Progress' group. In June 2010 I presented a poster summarising my work at the Birmingham University Research Student Poster Conference.

I have informally shared other aspects of my work with other individuals and groups. The work on cue cards was shared with another group in the Midlands doing similar work and I shared my work on sorting and diamond ranking with another research student. I have shared the executive summary (see Appendix 30) of the work with the current leadership team of the special school which the ex-pupils attended and with personnel from the local authority in which the school is situated.

Both a summary of the findings and several sections of the work may be suitable for publication in the appropriate journals. I am preparing several sections of the work for possible publication. A paper on the use of drawings to elicit and enhance data is

intended as a contribution to the discussion around using drawing by participants, sometimes alongside talk, to elicit perspectives from children and young people (Clark 2001, 2005, Einarsdottir et al 2009).

I am interested in sharing a paper outlining my personal position regards the ethical issues of doing research with people labelled as having learning difficulties: choosing what to research, choosing which paradigm in which to work and which methods to use. I would hope that this would contribute to debate amongst doctoral students as it is an area which we all need to clarify as new researchers.

An understanding of the competing perspectives of the history of special schooling forms a basis for making decisions in that field in the current day. It is because of such an understanding that we can subject today's proposals to the 'rigorous critical scrutiny' suggested by Dyson (Dyson 2001 p.28). A paper based on the relevant section of this work could, I hope, contribute to such an understanding.

5.6 A return to the research question

The research questions I posed in Chapter 1 described how I was providing well-grounded data from systematic analyses that will inform authorities and policy-makers in forming decisions about the placement of pupils with statements of SEN for MLD. I wanted to know whether (and how) pupils attending special schools were diminished or empowered by their experiences. The evidence would also illuminate

such pupils' teachers. Further, as a result, I described how the findings could be used both to inform increased inclusion for pupils labelled as having MLD and to renegotiate the role of special schools. Each of these will now be reviewed.

Informing the decision makers

The analysis provided in this work will prove useful when decisions are made about whether to place pupils in special schools. The work indicates that pupils who are not fully consulted about decisions to place them in special schools may come to resent their placement. As a result they may be at risk of developing depression and anger management problems; whereas pupils who feel that they took part in the decision were, from their self-reports more able to identify with their placements.

It is of concern that some pupils needed the haven of a special school to feel safe even from the perspective of several years later. Authorities need to be aware of this and should therefore investigate what it is about such pupils' experiences in mainstream schools that cause them to seek sanctuary elsewhere.

Are pupils diminished or empowered by their experience of special school?

This work evidences the empowering nature of a placement in special school for some pupils. Certainly all felt that they learnt better in special school, however any empowerment that this may bring has to be balanced against the lack of agency and feeling of being wrongly categorised against one's wishes which some experienced. For others, the feeling of being where one belonged and being involved in the decision to be there must surely be empowering especially when contrasted with the alternative, and for the group who found the special school a haven, at the very least they had achieved security which freed them to concentrate on learning.

Informing the teachers

Those pupils who did not identify with their placement in special school felt they had not taken part in the decision to place them there. This work therefore evidences the need to continually elicit the views of pupils from an early age so that pupils are facilitated in both having opinions and expressing them. Teachers in both school settings need to be vigilant in identifying how each pupil is responding to their placement and in representing these views to the authorities who ultimately make placement decisions.

Increasing inclusion in mainstream schools

The work provides evidence for a number of ways in which mainstream schools can become more inclusive, (see recommendations for improving the learning environment p228), if mainstream schools were able to implement these recommendations they would surely enable more pupils to maintain a placement there.

Renegotiating the role of the special school

This work does not evidence the need for a radically new role for MLD special schools; rather it provides some pointers as to (1) how special schools can enhance inclusion by providing guidance in identifying pupils who may be better placed in a mainstream schools, and (2) how they can introduce less restrictive practices for pupils who are appropriately placed in the special school.

5.7 Concluding note

This thesis is the culmination not only of the work directly reported here, but also of six taught modules and assignments and an extended preparatory work which together with the thesis constitute the Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme at Birmingham University (see Appendix 31 for a list of modules attended and titles of related assignments submitted as part of the EdD programme).

I was originally motivated by a desire to make sense of my own position as a teacher in a special school at a time when the debate around locational inclusion of all pupils was at its height. Mostly I wanted to know what was best for the pupils I taught. I have not, of course, answered my original question, though I have learnt that 'what is best' will never be achieved in the absence of the pupils' perspectives. However I believe this work does make a contribution to knowledge in its demonstration that pupils' have perspectives that can be elicited and which are valuable, its recommendations for achieving a more inclusive learning environment and, its application of theory to understanding the responses of pupils to their special school placement. It has also provided evidence to support the use of particular research methods.

Dyson (2001) reminded us that inclusion has offered new opportunities and possibilities as well as creating some new problems, the major problem being the dilemma of whether to treat all pupils in the same way or to recognise their differences in the way they are treated. He went on to invite us to 'put ourselves in a position to manage the complexities and contradictions with which we are faced in a more informed way' (Dyson 2001 p.28) and to ask the right sorts of questions of any proposals. I am confident that we will be more informed if we talk to pupils and act upon what they tell us. This work demonstrates their unique contribution to decisions which will not be fully informed if they are made in the absence of that contribution.

The final word in this work belongs to the ex-pupils. Tony was asked how his special school experience could have been improved, though he had said that he would have liked to go to mainstream school; his comments demonstrate insight, impartiality and an ability to communicate. We need to listen.

T:'I would have had… liked to have had more… more of… more errrm… (tuts) … communication with the mainstream schools.
R: Right. Why's that?
T: To understand about us an' that.
R: To understand about us?
T: Ye.
R: When you say 'us', who do you mean?
T: Like basically what's special needs school all about and that.
R: Right. Have you found that people don't know what special needs schools are about?
T: I think some people perhaps needs to be told and how good a special school is.
(Tony)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

RECORD OF SUPERVISION 16/09/03

Student: Heather Sullivan **Time/Date of supervision:** 2pm 16/09/03

1. Work undertaken since last supervision:

- Permission gained from Headteacher, parents and pupils to do research
- Investigating methods for assessing self-esteem of pupils
    1. Pupils' drawings and commentaries (8 pupils)
    2. Audio recording of pupils talking about their drawings in pairs in private (4 pupils)
    3. B/G-Steem Test (7 pupils) – using Primary scale. (5 boys, 2 girls)
    4. 2 sessions (total 1 hour) of group interview of 8 pupils, transcribed and "light" analysis Produced grid of methods of assessing/investigating self-esteem/concept
    5. Some literature searching

2. Comment on current work including any difficulties experienced

Am currently thinking that my method of investigating s.e. will be to use the B/G-Steem test together with group interviews (with better considered questions) followed up with individual interviews. Am continuing with the idea of interviewing "old" students of the Special School.

3. Other issues discussed at supervision

- Need for monthly meetings
- Need to start thinking about discourse analysis
- Need to use "note taking" IT software
- Structure of course for coming year – Only two available modules – both in Spring
- Need to keep in touch with AL by email

4. Work to be undertaken for the next meeting, including any submission date and supervisor response:

- Find, read and produce critique of Brahm Norwich/Fox paper, 1000 words, email to AL week before next meeting
- Read chapter in Robson on discourse analysis and take two methods "further"
- Find course in training guide from Info. Services
- Attend Ron Gulliford lecture 9.10.03

5. Focus of next meeting:

- Critique of Norwich/Fox paper
- Method of discourse analysis
- Structure of course 03/04

6. Date and time of next meeting 2pm. Wednesday 15th October 2003

Filled in by:

Heather Sullivan

A copy of this form should be kept by supervisor and student

APPENDIX 2

The history of special education

First I will outline some of the difficulties around writing a history of special education and of teasing out interests and motives for change. Despite this I will then endeavour to give an account of the development of special education within the context of mainstream education from approximately 1870, being the date of the commencement of educational provision for all children, until approximately 1990, being the time when the subjects of this work had entered special education. In the main I will limit that account to the education of pupils with learning difficulties though there are some references to other impairments. In referring to people with learning difficulties I will use the terminology used in the texts that I cite. I am aware that these may now be considered offensive but I feel they are useful in that they often reveal more about the thinking of the time and/or of their author. In the account I will attempt to represent and comment on the differing perspectives that there are in this area, my aim is to provide a context to how and maybe why the ex-pupils in this study found themselves in a special school. I devote part of this commentary to describing the views of Copeland (1996) who explains the particular model of special education that was adopted first by the London School Board and which then served as a model for other authorities, within the framework of Foucault's concept of 'normalization'. I do this because I think his views illustrate well the difference between a 'traditional' and an 'effective' (see below for explanation) history. I will refer to Cole's 'liberal humanitarian' view (Cole 1990), as a more reasoned explanation than the more polarised views of Tomlinson (1982) and Pritchard (1963). I will conclude with my own view of what we can usefully learn from this complex area with reference to Dyson's (Dyson 2001) alternative to the 'unduly optimistic' or 'unduly pessimistic' views

Competing perspectives

The history of special education is one of complexity, of competing perspectives and some would argue of perspectives that are not able to compete (See Winzer 1993, Swain 2005 and Van Drenth, 2005 for accounts of the neglect of the perspectives of those who were subjected to the practices of special education). Sociological, psychological, medical, scientific and political perspectives each offer a different view as do politicians, various professionals, parents and pupils; though, as already stated, the perspectives of these latter two have proved difficult to access. A study of the history also reveals competing concerns including: economic efficiency, humanitarian care, control, access to education and human rights. The history is a mine field of dichotomies: traditional or effective (Armstrong, 2002, Armstrong, 2007, Lanear, 2007, Read & Walmsley, 2006), policy or practice (Read and

Walmsley, 2006), optimistic or pessimistic (Dyson, 2001), social control/vested interest or liberal humanitarian (Cole, 1990).

Traditional histories or a complexity of interests and motives?

I hope to resist the temptation to present a purely 'traditional' history of special education, for as others (Armstrong, 2002, Armstrong, 2007, Lanear, 2007, Read & Walmsley, 2006) have explained these accounts, mainly of education acts and policy documents which are 'the formal, public facade of historical development' (Armstrong 2002 p.455), do contribute one perspective, however they neglect to account for how and if policy became practice, and how if it did become practice it was often unevenly across geographic locations and at different times (see accounts of the contrast between London and Bedford in early provision of special education in Read and Walmsley (2006), differences in expenditure between Birmingham and Warrington in Hurt (1988) and of differences in assessment for entry to special schools in Myers and Brown (2005)). Traditional histories certainly neglect to represent the accounts of those people who were subjected to the practices of special education (Winzer 1993, Swain 2005), the 'histories of consumption, application and effects of these ideas at a local level.', the accounts given by pupils and their families who had direct experience of special schooling (Myers and Brown 2005 p73). In an attempt to see beyond the more facile historical accounts, Armstrong (2002) suggests 'alternative and additional' sources such as...

> '...the history of town planning and the design of buildings, representations in novels and films of disabled people, the study of paintings and other historically situated material, and most of all the lives of people themselves as they are expressed through their own accounts.'
>
> (Armstrong, 2002 p. 455)

These, she writes, should be used to test out the evidence from more traditional sources. However Read and Walmsley (2006) endeavoured to uncover 'the perspectives of those who were subject to the policies [of special education] – children and their families – drawing on documentary sources, oral history and biographies.'(p.456), but they were frustrated in their endeavour.

> 'Despite our best efforts, our attempts to find the authentic voice of recipients of early forms of special education have not succeeded. Instead the historical record is documented only in the professional voice, principally of teachers, doctors and institutional staff.'
> (Read & Walmsley, 2006 p.467)

Their **earliest** oral history came from Beryl, born in 1937 and interviewed in1991. Similarly Humphries and Gordon's (1992) book provides the '**first ever** account'

(emphasis added) of the lives of blind, deaf and physically disabled people growing up in the first half of the 20th century. It seems that there is scant evidence of personal experience from any time before this.

It is tempting to think that histories of any topic describe a story of steady, smooth and planned improvement or progress, from bad to good, or at least better, indeed Potts (1995 p.409) accuses Pritchard (1963) of just such a 'deceptively simple' portrayal, and Cole (1990) describes how Pritchard 'saw special education as having evolved primarily to help the handicapped child themselves.' Myers and Brown (2005) describe these as the 'happy narratives of progress', these are the oldest types of accounts and share 'a tendency to simple description'. They are 'the perspective of the policymaker and the administrator' and they treat 'uncritically or somewhat indulgently the advance of scientific and medical knowledge.' They 'effectively silence the voices of the people deemed mentally deficient or in need of special schooling'(Myers and Brown 2005 p.101). Armstrong refutes the view of steady, planned, improvement:

> 'The development of special education is a social process and, contrary to some accounts, has not followed an orderly and progressive pathway or been planned according to rational principles.'
> (Armstrong 2002 p.445)

Whilst I agree with Armstrong that the steady, planned improvement is too simplistic a view, I am more dubious as to whether the **popular** view of historic development in this field, as she goes on to describe it, is one of benevolence, (Armstrong 2002, p.441), for stories of beadles and workhouses are familiar to us from an early age, and I believe this gives most lay people a very grim view of 17th, 18th and 19th century education in general. I understand her view that many historical accounts are of individuals, perhaps unquestioningly portrayed as benefactors, but it is undeniable that there is evidence of altruistic benevolence, for example Earl Shaftesbury's support of 'ragged' schools (Hansard, 1861) and their conception by John Pounds (Barnes-Downing et al 2007). The position taken by Ford et al (1982) was to admit that there were 'significant individuals, whose philanthropy was obvious and unquestionable,', but that 'Little has ever been achieved by an oppressed, dependent or minority group or class without conflict and struggle.' (Ford et al, 1983 p.10). It is always difficult to identify motive, to tease out benevolence and altruism from more selfish motives or from budgetary pressures, and almost impossible when dealing with historical events. In a paper commenting on the views of some sociologists that 'special educational provision developed … …to serve the economic and commercial interests of society,' rather than for any more selfless reasons, Cole (1990 p.101) argues that… 'Contemporary documents more clearly demonstrate a common humanity and a desire to improve provision for the good of the handicapped child…' (Cole 1990 p.106). However the 1899 Report of the Royal Commission on the blind and deaf etc. reveals that they also had to consider economic expediency.

> It is better for the State to use the funds of elementary and technical education for a few years rather than have to support them through life in idleness, or to allow

> them to obtain their livelihood from private and public charity'
> (Report of the Royal Commission on the blind and deaf etc. 1899 v1 para. 240 p. xxxviii)

Clearly as Read concluded after analysis of London School Board documentation, motives and intentions are complex.

> 'for at least some of the women and men who made special schools their area of activity, optimism and a rhetoric of compassion coexisted with participation in the processes of classification that constructed the 'feeble-minded' child as 'other' and helped to justify the containment of that child in the separate space of the special school'
> (Read 2004 p. 299)

Read concluded, as I do that, '... **a range of motivations** drove policy and practice and that humanitarian concern was a key element and not simply a cloak for other intentions.' (p.298 emphasis added)

A brief history of education for the 'intellectually impaired'

Though I am aware of the limitations of such a description I will briefly outline the salient features of education legislation from 1870 to 1990 which show the roots of special education. 1870 is not of course when English education begins, before the 19th century a range of schools already existed in England.

> 'Private venture schools of all kinds, both charitable and profit-making, industrial schools, Sunday schools, charity schools, 'National' schools, 'British' schools, Jewish schools, Roman Catholic schools, dissenting schools, ragged schools, reformatories, orphanages, poor law schools, and even factory schools, are all to be found.'
> (Cockburn et al 1969)

However Benson Clough reports that by 1870:

> '...popular attention had been keenly directed to the complete failure of the [elementary] schools to reach a great mass of the children.'
> (Benson Clough 1904 p57)

The 1870 Education (Forster) Act (Elementary Education Act 1870) for the first time made it the duty of the State to see that every child received a suitable education (Cunningham Glenn 1870 and Hansard 1870). Public funds were provided to build schools where there were none. From 1870 to 1891, statutes were passed to: broaden the curriculum, improve methods of teaching, increase numbers of staff, and to

improve buildings. The Act of 1870 had preserved the payment of school fees, though there was some provision for the very needy, no one was entitled to free education.

Via the Act of 1891, free education became possible for all (Elementary Education Act 1891), except compulsory education was not extended to blind and deaf children until the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act of 1893, and it made provision for the creation of special schools. However the intellectually impaired pupils who were not so severely impaired as to be classified as 'idiots' or 'imbeciles', (see Harris, 2006 p21 for an explanation of Seguin's classification of intellectual disability), but were 'backward' enough to not be able to benefit from their placement, did find themselves confined in low classes of the ordinary schools.

The 1880 Education Act had made school attendance compulsory for five to ten year olds, though this proved difficult to enforce, however children under thirteen years of age could only leave school if they had a certificate to say they had achieved the required standard. By the end of the century the upper age for compulsory education had been raised to twelve years of age though this was not enforced until the early years of the 20th century.

Copeland (1996 p.378) examines the model of special education introduced by the London School Board and compares it with an alternative model developed in Leicester. He uses the London model to illustrate Foucault's explanation of how ideas or systems become accepted as normal or unquestioned, and this 'normalization' then becomes a form of control.

Copeland describes three background factors which led to the emergence of classes for dull, deficient, defective pupils in the final decade of the last century. These factors were: a) the sudden comprehensive nature of elementary education, b) the size of classes...

> For the first time, there were present in school children who had received no formal teaching and coming from families whose members had not attended school. These children were often the offspring of migrant labourers who had moved to centres of industry in pursuit of work.
> (Copeland 1996 p. 378)

...and c) the approach to teaching induced by the system of payment by results. He goes on to explain that two Royal Commissions in 1885 and 1886 were set up, the former to look into elementary education and the latter which was extended in its brief to include: '...the deaf and dumb and of such other cases as from special circumstances would seem to require exceptional methods of education'. Copeland believes that this coexistence of two commissions caused the subdivision of pupils into... 'the large majority, who were the concern of the Elementary Education Acts, and the small minority considered exceptional or unusual children'. (p.380) Copeland also felt that the: 'the division created a hierarchy consisting of children considered capable of coping with the system and those who could not.' (p.380)

> '...there are a great many backward children in our elementary schools who require a different treatment to that of the ordinary children.
> (RCBDD, 1889b, p104)

Copeland points out that because 'deaf' and 'dumb' were medical categories imbecility and idiocy (as the report goes on to call the 'backward' children) therefore became medical conditions by association. This process matches Foucault's five processes of normalization: comparison, of the exceptional group with their peers, differentiation, the 1886 Commission recommended differentiated provision, hierarchisation, by identifying the exceptional children by definition they were abnormal compared to the normal, homogenisation, exceptional children located alongside deaf and dumb, and exclusion, imbeciles and idiots were to be separated from 'normal' peers but the Commission was not clear about whether the report recommended feeble minded should be provided for inside 'normal' schools or outside (Copeland, 1996, p.383-4).

> 'We recommend-That with regard to feeble-minded children they should be separated from ordinary scholars in public elementary schools in order that they may receive special instruction, and that the attention of school authorities be particularly directed towards this object.'
> (Royal Commission into the Blind, Deaf and Dumb &c,1889b para. 725 p. Cvi)

Copeland criticises the approach of the London School Board because of this 'normalization' process which seduced other authorities into copying their model of separate schooling based largely on a medical/scientific artificial norm of intellect. Whereas Leicester School Board had mostly provided for pupils with special educational needs within the existing schools and kept it an educational rather than medical issue.

So by the turn of the new century the various commissions and acts of parliament had defined what was normal, (though this was a rather arbitrary definition until attempts to numerically categorise intellect in later years), and brought children that were 'abnormal', as a group, into public view, though as provision for this group was not made compulsory until 1914, (according to Cole 1990, this was because of financial reasons), only about half of the authorities had attempted to meet their needs by 1909 (Hendrick 2003 p.53).

Another attempt was made to further exclude pupils by the Radnor Commission which reported to parliament in1908. The exclusion recommended was not only from day schools into residential care but also from the education authorities and into the care of the medical authorities, for the report proposed the setting up of 'local mental deficiency committees' and what's more that the existing special schools should be transferred to their care. The motivation for this proposed increased exclusion was from fears of degeneracy (Cole 1989, Hendrick 2003) for Radnor Commission

witnesses had given evidence for the link between 'mental defect' and crime, drunkenness, prostitution, poverty and illegitimacy (Hendrick 2003 p. 55). However, Hendrick (2003) wrote that for financial reasons, and because the already existing day special schools under the local education authorities showed that day schools worked, these particular recommendations did not become law.

It is easy to fall into a trap of assuming that these proposals which sometimes went on to become legislation, and which to most today would be unacceptable, represented the overwhelmingly popular view and were the only and hugely predominant proposals of the day. There are in fact many examples where exclusion was resisted and Foucault's theory of 'normalization' and some sociological perspectives which foreground control and economic interests (see Tomlinson 1982) do not seem so applicable. For example Warner, a witness for the Radnor Commission, in fact recommended separate classes but within existing elementary schools and seemed to recognise that the five per cent of pupils, that he calculated could not cope within the then ordinary elementary education, could not cope because of: 'irregular development of hearing and eyesight, diseases of heart and lungs, being orphaned, large classes, mechanical teaching and examination and cruel and brutal methods of correction, in other words they were all environmental issues. Even the controversial (Hendrick, 2003) Radnor Report itself recognised that the 'backward' child as opposed to the 'truly feeble-minded' had difficulties caused by the environment and proposed that they should therefore be educated in ordinary schools (Cole 1989). Hendrick also points out that at this time any proposed exclusionary measures were resisted by ... '...a deeply ingrained hostility to the curtailment of individual freedom, which should not be underestimated (Hendrick 2003 p.55). Yet again Cole writes of how... '...the Board of Education was not convinced by [The Radnor Commission's] eugenic fears and their more extreme opinions seemed at variance with the opinions of the nation for practical and moral reasons.'(Cole, 1989, p.62). Cole also writes that some recommendations of the 1899 Education Act, (which recommended but did not oblige local authorities to make provision for special instruction), were rejected because of the success and popularity with some parents of special classes for the educable feeble-minded and because of campaigning by voluntary bodies. All of these run contrary to the view that there was a rush to exclude and separate for the sake of the majority. Though it is true that there were times when more exclusionary recommendations were not realised for less altruistic reasons, usually of an economic nature.

By 1913, Tomlinson reported that there were 12,000 'defective' children in 177 special schools, plus voluntary provision and that 175 education authorities had made some state provision (Tomlinson, 1982, p.33). The 1914 Education Act made education of all but the lowest grade of feeble-minded children compulsory and it was to take place in classes and schools to be run by local education authorities, the small number in the lowest grades- were to be referred to the new Board of Control (Cole 1989, p.62).

Read and Walmsley (2006) wrote that by using different sources...

> '...a range of documentary evidence from the public and the private domain: minutes and, particularly, witness evidence of the DCEDC; minutes of London's Special Schools sub-committee and of Bedfordshire's Mental Deficiency committee, both responsible for the local implementation of national policy; correspondence to both authorities; institutional records from the Public Record Office and Bromham House in Bedford; special school logbooks and privately written accounts.'
> (Read and Walmsley, 2006 p.457)

...they could identify a gradual move from an optimism at the turn of the century that the special needs of these children could be met, to provision, (or even lack of it in the case of Bedford education authority), which offered either institutionalization and/or neglect until the 1950s when... '..negative thinking about the potential of 'special' children again came to be challenged.' (Read andWalmsley 2006 p. 467). They also show through this alternative evidence that although legislation applied across England, provision was very much a lottery depending on where the child lived. Where special school provision was poor but enthusiasm for the new technology for assessing intellect via the IQ test, (the use of which was formalised in the Mental Deficiency Act 1913), was prevalent, as in Bedford, then pupils with now 'clearly identified' special needs could only be catered for in distant institutions, left at home or left in the ordinary elementary schools. To prove the value of using alternative evidence Read and Walmsley give two very contrasting accounts of the same mental health hospital, one from the mental welfare officer and one from a patient. It is with accounts like this that Read and Walmsley evidence the neglect of the inter-war years and present it as an alternative view to the one of progress that the professionals and records of legislation might give.

The introduction of 'intelligence testing' seems to highlight an ongoing fight for dominance of the 'special education' arena between the education professionals and the medical professionals, a fight that does seem to have been be polarised between the disposition of the medical world to identify, separate, treat and exclude and of the education world to adapt, respond to needs and generally include. But this is probably too simplistic a view. For it seems that even the medical professionals, not least the intelligence tester, psychologist Burt recognised that people with IQ in 75-85 range were too numerous to segregate in colonies and he saw that environmental factors such as bad housing and stressful impoverished life-styles were often the cause of educational backwardness and associated problems. The seeming polarity in at least some instances was perhaps more to do with the fact that the medical people were focused on the children with severe and profound educational needs whereas the teaching professionals were preoccupied with the pupils with less severe needs. Even so, the 1921 Education Act (Education Act 1921) serves to illustrate the polarised account. The act said that children in the five categories of: mental defective, physical defective, blind, deaf and epileptic should be certified as such and educated separately in special schools funded differently from the elementary schools and inspected by the Medical Branch of the Board of Education, however this was abandoned in 1934 and His Majesty's Inspectorate resumed inspection... '...in an attempt to bring special schools more within the educational mainstream.' (Cole 1989 p. 69). The shortage of funds which characterised the inter-war period impacted badly on provision informed

by both standpoints so that the needs of any of these children were far from adequately met.

Tomlinson describes the 1944 Education Act as 'a major effort by educationalists to move as many 'defective' children as possible out of medical domination and place them firmly under an educational aegis.' (Tomlinson, 1982, pp 49-50). The Act removed the need for pupils to be certificated in one of the five categories which was in recognition of the stigmatizing effect it had had, but the 1945 Special Education Regulations increased the categories to eleven. Local education authorities were now obliged to meet the needs of handicapped children under the general directive:

> '...to afford for all pupils opportunities for education offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities, and aptitudes, and of the different periods for which they may be expected to remain at school, including practical instruction and training appropriate to their respective needs.
> (Education Act, 1944 p.5)

The Act also reversed 1921 Act stipulation that special education had to take place in special schools. The intelligence quotient was still pre-eminent and pupils with an IQ of less than fifty were deemed ineducable, excluded from local authority schools and remained a medical concern. The label mentally defective was replaced by an educationally sub-normal (ESN) category. However the Act preserved the essentially medical, within child view of special needs whereby children needed treatment and special schools were where they were to be 'treated'. If parents resisted the suggestion of the 'medical officer' that their child should attend special school then a certificate could still be issued which could 'secure their attendance' (Education Act 1944 p.28).

Though many more children were thus included back into the auspices of the education authorities the percentage of pupils in special school remained stable between1939 and 1967 (Cole 1999, p133) but over the next ten years the more exclusionary practice of sending more disruptive Educationally sub-normal (ESN) pupils to state boarding special schools became common. Tomlinson (1982) explains the failure of special education to be catered for in ordinary schools subsequent to the 1944 Act as partly to do with the vested interests of 'expanding profession of special education' who would 'lose clients' (Tomlinson, 1982, p. 51). Cole is critical of Tomlinson's 'vested interest' stance and of her talk of 'medical men' as a professional group competing with 'educationalists' (Cole 1990, p. 106). He argues that she does not evidence her views and that there is much evidence to support the contrary view that, 'Being a member of a particular profession has not guaranteed adherence to any particular viewpoint' and that in any case 'medical men' were often also 'educationalists'. I rather agree with Cole and would add that maybe a blend of altruistic philanthropy, personal ambition and even vested interests is and has been the motivation for most developments and that arguably that blend is necessary for achieving the best possible outcomes.

In 1970 the education of the severely sub-normal was transferred by the Education (Mentally Handicapped) Act of that year (Education (Handicapped Children) Act 1970), from the National Health Service to Local Authority. From then on no child could be described as ineducable, rather they would be categorised as ESN. This together with increased recognition of and provision for 'maladjusted' pupils meant that the percentage of pupils in special schooling rose from under one percent to around one and a half percent by 1987.

By the mid seventies there were notable moves towards integration of all children. The 1976 Education Act first obliged the normal county or voluntary schools to provide for pupils requiring 'special educational treatment' (Education Act 1976, section 10 p.5) but subject to the same 'let out' conditions which were written in to the subsequent 1981 Act which suspended the 1976 Act (See below for these conditions). In 1978 The Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (The Warnock Report) was published. It reported that there had been a steady increase in the provision of special education within ordinary schools from nearly seven percent in 1973 to twelve percent in 1977. (ch 7.2) The report supported 'the principle of the development of common provision for all children.', and opposed ' the notion of treating handicapped and non-handicapped children as forming two distinctive groups.(ch7.3) It stated that up to twenty percent of pupils would at some time need some form of special education provision (p.338), and perhaps this was its major contribution to integration, i.e. the opening up of the concept of special needs and provision as a continuum from which many or any pupils at some time might benefit. However Lunt (2007) suggests that when realized in law it had the opposite effect 'of creating a **further** category (SEN) of pupils in mainstream schools who were in some way different from 'the majority of children.' (Lunt 2007 p.106). The 1981 Education Act informed by the Warnock Report and the 1980 government's response to it, (Special Needs in Education) introduced the concept of the 'statement' which describes the needs and the ways these needs should be met for any child for whom the local education authority thought special provision was necessary, it was an assurance that needs would be met. As Lunt suggested the numbers of statemented pupils increased threefold between 1985 and 1987. The Act stated that:

> 'Where a local education authority arrange special educational provision for a child for whom they maintain a statement ... ...it shall be the duty of the authority,... ...to secure that he is educated in an ordinary school. The conditions are that account has been taken,... ...of the views of the child's parent and that educating the child in an ordinary school is compatible with-(a) his receiving the special educational provision that he requires ; (b) the provision of efficient education for the children with whom he will be educated ; and (c) the efficient use of resources.
> (Education Act 1981 section 2 p.2)

Many of the recommendations of the Warnock Report were not realized in the subsequent Act because the government decided that no extra funds were to be made available (Cole, 1989 p.136). However, notably the 1981 Act did abolish the categories of need of the 1944 Act and in accordance with Warnock's recommendations did introduce the much broader concept of 'special education need' (SEN). The object of the assessment process now became a description of the individual's educational needs and 'special education consists of the arrangements made to meet the described needs.' (Brennan 1982, p.56).

The 1988 Education Act introduced a statutory national curriculum and obligatory standardised tests for pupils at seven, eleven and fourteen years of age. The same act introduced formula funding and league tables and city technology colleges (HMSO 1988). The impact of each of these on schools should not be underestimated for schools could now succeed or fail by the market forces that could operate when parents perused the published league tables to see which school was the most 'successful', i.e. which school had more pupils achieving five grade A-Cs in their annual GCSEs. This had 'considerable impact on... ...schools' ability to support pupils with SEN... ... and resulted in an increase in the number of pupils identified as having SEN and in those excluded from school (Lunt 2007 p.105).

The 1993 Education Act introduced the Code of Practice which provided 'practical guidance to LEAs and school governing bodies on their responsibilities towards pupils with SEN' (Daniels et al 1999 p. vii). Daniels suggests that whilst the Code's five staged approach to intervention, raised the profile of special needs particularly in mainstream schools, there were concerns about workload particularly for the teachers who became Special Educational Needs coordinators (SENCOs), the time spent on paperwork including individual education plans and the consequent reduced time spent teaching. 'Most schools were optimistic about their ability to implement the Code but... ... there was less certainty that the Code would improve the education of pupils with SEN (Daniels 1999 p.viii). At a later stage than this account covers the Code was indeed revised in simpler form.

It was at this time that most of the pupils in this study started to attend their special school.

At the beginning of this review I referred to Dyson's alternative to the 'unduly optimistic' or 'unduly pessimistic' views (Dyson 2001) of the history of special education. His paper: 'Special needs in the twenty-first century: where we've been and where we're going', not only brings this review up to date in its use of the term 'inclusive education', but it guides us as to what we can gain from a study of that history and how we can use this to subject new resolutions that may be foist upon us to 'rigorous critical scrutiny' (Dyson 2001 p.28).

Dyson summarised the optimistic view of special education history as '...we know more, we can do more and have more humane attitudes than our counterparts in former times.' (p.24). Whereas the 'pessimistic view' emanates from the critical traditions of sociology which see the history as one of struggle between vested interests of powerful on the one hand and the oppressed and their struggle for inclusion on the other. Dyson argues that an alternative view is possible. He writes that there is a 'fundamental contradiction' within the education system, '...between an intention to treat all learners as essentially the same and an equal and opposite intention to treat them as different.' He invites us to see the history then in the context of this struggle. In other words we have to accept that we will never resolve the dilemma and should be wary of proposals that say they will do just that. But what we can usefully learn from an acceptance of this is the right sorts of questions to ask of any future proposals, we can be more aware of the pitfalls that might arise and of the probable transitory nature of those proposals. This does not mean though that proposals are of no use, inclusion has offered new opportunities and possibilities as well as creating some new problems. But what we are asked to do is to 'put ourselves in a position to manage the complexities and contradictions with which we are faced in a more informed way' (Dyson 2001 p.28).

I do not believe that the history of special education is one of pure altruism, selflessness and philanthropy, though there are examples of all three, but neither do I believe it to be a story of self-seeking, vested interests, clinging to power and social control, though again I am sure examples of each can be found. Rather I agree with Cole (1989) that it is important that the past is viewed in an accurate and balanced manner. In reality the history does not nicely fit with either of these polarised explanations, more probably it is a complex mixture of each of these tempered by pragmatism, economic restraints and unexpected events. Rather than feel the need to ally ourselves with either of the extreme views it might be more useful to look for other models such as Dyson's described above.

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APPENDIX 3

Sociological and developmental reasons why accessing the voice of young people has become an issue

Sociological: The changing construction of childhood

If one's understanding of childhood is that it is an immature version of adulthood and that its value lies solely in it being a time for preparation for adulthood, then one could logically conclude that adults have little to gain from listening to children, that they have nothing of value to contribute. However some would argue that the past twenty-five years has seen a change in how society has constructed childhood, that there has been a move from viewing the child as an 'incomplete' or 'adult-in-training' to seeing them as 'beings in their own right', from seeing them as passive subjects to seeing them as actors (James and Prout, 1997). Childhood is now considered by many sociologists of childhood to be a culture distinct from adulthood (Corsaro, 2005). Rose and Shevlin, write of... '... a discernible transformation in the philosophical concepts of childhood during the twentieth century.' (Rose and Shevlin, 2004 p 155). Whereas legislation from 1889 to 1959 had portrayed the deficit model of childhood, with children as the property of the parents and passive recipients of decision making about their lives, in the 1980s a more active, participatory and individualistic role for children was placed on the agenda which viewed children as having views about their own lives and a right to genuine participation in decisions affecting them (Taylor 2000).

If we believe that childhood is a separate culture, of inherent value, then we are bound to listen to, and act upon, what we hear from children, for there is no other way that society can optimize childhood.

Whereas the consulting of close adults, such as parents and teachers, to speak on behalf of the child was once acceptable there is now a recognition that the child's perspective cannot be 'second guessed' by adults (Beresford 1997). There has been a call for pupils to be involved in their own annual reviews Hayes (2004) and in assessments (Gersch 1990). Pupils are described as 'experts in their own lives' (Clark and Moss 2001).

Developmental: The changing ideas around cognitive development

Our disinclination to accept the witness of children and young people with learning disabilities was founded on the understanding that they were cognitively immature (Thompson 2008, Beresford 1997), unable to reflect and had inadequate memories. It is now suggested that it is the interviewer's inadequacy, rather than the interviewee's, that has lead to any lack of reliability in the responses (Dockrell et al 2000).

In the last quarter of the 20th century there was a move away from the proposition, reflected in the work of Piaget (1969) that, as they developed cognitively, children moved through innate, set, sequential stages. Progression through these stages was

partly characterised by the gradual decrease in egocentricity and the move from concrete operations to abstract thought. However, Donaldson (1978) demonstrated that pre-school children are, contrary to Piaget's early theorising, able to "de-centre", or appreciate another person's point of view and be reflective, if they understand fully what is expected of them. She believed that Piaget's experimental work had not taken into account the fact that:

> "... when a child interprets what we say to him his interpretation is influenced by at least three things (and the ways in which these interact with each other) - his knowledge of the language, his assessment of what we intend as indicated by our non-linguistic behaviour), and the manner in which he would represent the physical situation to himself if we were not there at all.'
> (Donaldson 1978 p.69)

It is now suggested that young people with special educational needs **can** provide valid and reliable information. To illustrate the position that children, especially those with learning disabilities, find themselves in, Dockrell (2004), invites us to consider being interviewed in a language in which we are not proficient and how our responses would not necessarily fully reflect our understanding. The increased awareness of cognitive development means that young people and adults with learning difficulties are no longer dismissed as unreliable witnesses, neither to crime nor their own experiences, and so their views are now considered to be worth accessing.

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APPENDIX 4: Work grid

WORK	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Training University modules attended Workshops attended Conferences attended Papers produced	Research methods: Identity and Epistemology	Designing research: Using Sources Producing Analysis Use of Endnote Use of Nvivo Participatory research Methodologies in context: Steps and stages towards workable research strategies (Student conference)	Ed. Disability , social justice and education Educational disadvantage and special educational need Inclusion Analysing text data Making research design decisions: Science or Art (Student Conference) Validity/reliability	Learning and Transformation: theoretical perspectives Researchers and researching: Dealing with uncertainty (Student conference)			Education research: Strengths and Limitations (Student Conference)	Education research, Education researchers: Diverse experiences and perspectives. (Student conference)	

			Identity						
Pilots		Investigating methods for assessing s.e. Quantitative and Qualitative Piloting innovative methods: i) Cue cards ii) Drawings Interviews	Piloting a method for data collection for researching pupil's experiences of special ed.	Pilot interviews with foster daughter and her peers	Trialled Tomlinson's 'hierarchical focusing' for interviewing Trialled 'sorting' and 'diamond ranking'				
Publications and presentations					Sullivan, H. (2006) 'The role of the non-disabled researcher in researching		Sullivan, H. (2008) 'Eliciting the views of ex-pupils of a school for		Sullivan, H. (2010) Research in Progress seminar presentation:

					disability.' The Psychology of Education Review 30: 1 pp59-65		pupils with moderate learning difficulties.' In Corcoran, C., Cooke, S., Eden, R., Lucas-Gardiner, E. and Macnab, N (Eds.) Education Research: Strengths and Limitations. Birm. Uni: Published in CD format (Paper presented at Birmingham Uni. Sch. of Ed. Student conference)		Birmingham University School of Ed. Sullivan, H. (Submitted 2010) 'Ethical considerations when researching perspectives of people who have been to special school.' 'What's it like going to special school?' Poster presented at research student's poster conference Birmingham University

Final study					Interviewing, transcribing, respondent checking	Interviewing, transcribing, coding, respondent checking	Interviewing, transcribing, coding, analysis	Coding, analysis	Writing up Peer reliability reviewing
Dissemination									Sharing findings with participants

APPENDIX 5

Self-esteem: proposal for a small study

The issue

As teachers in a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and with the definite push for inclusion within our own authority, which is currently reducing numbers admitted to the school, we have concerns for the pupils who will now, and in the future, not come to the school. These are children who (despite the best endeavours of teachers in mainstream schools and best intentions of officers in the local authority), we believe may be damaged by their educational experience. I have frequently received into my class, children who have experienced up to seven or eight years of mainstream education. They have broadly fallen into two categories, quiet, timid, relatively low achievers, even when compared with their peers in the special school, or, superficially more "street-wise" boys, and they have always been boys, who tend to be disruptive and leave school with the poorest literacy skills. Whilst pupils who come to this all age school for the whole of their schooling seem to have more confidence, achieve better academically and rarely is their behaviour disruptive. In my MEd. study, (Sullivan 1999), I discovered that, within my own school and using a relatively crude measure, boys' self-esteem was significantly enhanced the longer they were in the school, (the girls' self-esteem showed no such significant correlation), though of course no causal link was proven.

The issue to be addressed is about educating pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and maximizing their inclusion in society. This begs the question of what constitutes the best preparation for any individual for inclusion in society. On any list, realizing academic potential would be at or near the top. But in a similar position we would want to see the development of characteristics that are both necessary for accessing all that society has to offer and for contributing to society. This research is based on the premise that emotional well being/maturity and hence self-esteem is one such characteristic and also probably an antecedent to academic achievement and must therefore also rank near or at the top of the same list.

The question

Is the self-esteem of pupils with a statement for moderate learning difficulties maximized in a special or mainstream setting? Is "inclusion" in the same geographically located educational institution more likely to enhance self-esteem than in a separate, special institution? This is, of course a multi-faceted question with many variables to be considered, other than location. Special provision also may mean – a different curriculum and it may differ in varying degrees from the mainstream provision, ranging from very similar to unrecognizably different. It may mean different methods, different priorities and different staffing. Provision for pupils with special educational needs within mainstream settings can also vary tremendously from "unit" based provision with a variety of degrees of separation/integration from/into the "normal" school provision, to complete integration. Within the "complete integration" model there is a range of provision from full time adult support to no separate support and with varying amounts of differentiation within the classroom.

However the “big question” regards pupils with SEN is, “mainstream” or “special” irrespective of these other variables? By “inclusion” most, politicians, local education authorities, lay people and probably most education professionals mean geographical inclusion in mainstream provision, irrespective of how inclusive the practices within the institution are. And it is with this separate “geographical” provision that this research is concerned.

This study will therefore be, **“A comparison of the measured self-esteem scores of a small group of pupils in mainstream schools who receive “outreach” support and a matched group from a separately located special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties in the same Local Education Authority”.**

Ethical Considerations

Permission will be sought from-

The pupils
Their parents
The head teachers of each school
The Local Education Authority (LEA)

For the “outreach pupils”, the outreach teacher who will administer the test will not mark the test, the response sheet will be numbered so the author will not know the name of the pupil in the outreach setting, but for purposes of administering the second test the outreach teacher will know the name and corresponding number of the pupil

but not their scores. However one might consider that a pupil's self-esteem score is a useful piece of information for the class teacher, especially as an earlier study by the author suggested that teachers are not good at assessing the self-esteem scores of their pupils purely from their knowledge of the pupil, so it is suggested that the information be made available to the head teacher of each school, to be used at their discretion.

Though pupils will be offered the opportunity not to take part in the test and to opt out at any time it has to be recognized that this is an option that they are unlikely to exercise in one to one situations. Teachers will therefore need to be particularly sensitive to the "unspoken" messages they receive from the pupil regards their willingness or otherwise to take part. The teacher will explain to the pupil that,

> "We are trying to find out how pupils in different schools feel about themselves. The person who looks at the answers won't know who you are and no one else will see your answers, the head teacher might be told a score that you get but not what you answer to each question. The head teacher might want to tell your teacher your score as well."

Feasibility

The author's school is an LEA, all age special school for pupils with MLD, but the majority of pupils have more complex difficulties including autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), social, emotional and behaviour difficulties (SEBD), language and communication difficulties and a small minority have more severe learning difficulties (SLD). For the past two years it has been the policy of the LEA, for teachers, (and this year teaching assistants), to support individual pupils in local mainstream schools for half a day per week. This has also been the practice in the

parallel special school. In total there are about 20 such pupils receiving this support. They range from year 4 to year 7.

It is proposed that these pupils are "matched" with pupils from the special school. They will be matched for age, reading age, maths age and gender. Only pupils with a statement for moderate learning difficulties will be included. Pupils with ASD will not be included.

The reading and maths ages are already available for the special school pupils. In most cases they will be also be available for the mainstream pupils. It will be necessary to check that the same tool has been used to assess them and to synchronize the testing time. The special school pupils are tested in June each year. If the mainstream pupils were not tested at a very similar time and with the same test it may be necessary to test the whole sample within one week using the same test, but different from the one normally used, this to avoid exposing the special school pupils to the same test more than once in a 12 month period. Once the mainstream sample has been "matched" the self-esteem test can be administered. However the author would also like to take this opportunity to test the correspondence of two measuring tools, B/G STEEM (Maines et al 1993) and LAWSEQ (Lawrence 1981). (This is for the purposes of a proposed future study). So it is proposed that both tests will be administered to each pupil, one per week, in successive weeks. These will be the same weeks for all pupils.

Analysis of results

The results will be analysed for correlation between self-esteem score and educational setting, mainstream or special. Any correlations will be tested for statistical significance.

The B/G STEEM measure provides measurements of self-esteem in different categories, general, academic, physical, family and social. It also tests for locus of control. These results can be used to give a total, overall score for self-esteem but the information will be there to do a finer analysis within the different categories if.

The LAWSEQ test gives a general score which will be compared with the overall B/G STEEM score to assess the correlation between the two tools for future reference.

Validity/Reliability/Trade offs

Measuring tools

Both B/G STEEM and LAWSEQ are standardized tools which have been developed in the UK. B/G STEEM is recommended for use with pupils aged 6-12yrs. LAWSEQ has a primary and secondary version, it is proposed that the, slightly adapted, primary test is used. Both tests when piloted only used questions that had test : retest reliability of at least 79%. The LAWSEQ test was shown to have a good correlation with another reputable test, the Coopersmith Self-esteem inventory (Coopersmith 1967).

Administration

Ideally the tests should be administered by one person. This is not feasible for this study due to the work commitments of the author. The author will administer the test to the special school pupils and outreach teachers will be advised on the process of administering the test in a standardized format by the author.

Generalisability

The sample used here is too small and the un-isolated variables too numerous to generalize any results to other populations. The best that can be hoped for is that they give some insight as to the self-esteem of these particular pupils at this particular time. To generalize a much bigger sample would be necessary and a more refined matching process. Even then it is difficult to isolate variables such as the home life experiences that pupils have had and which undoubtedly have a huge effect on their self-esteem, nor the individual school experiences. Different schools, both within the mainstream sector and within the special sector will provide environments which are more or less enhancing of their pupils' self esteem. The sample is limited though by the availability of pupils in special school settings in any one authority. Therefore within an authority the sample would never be large enough to negate the effect of unmatched variables. Enlarging the sample would mean including other LEAs and thereby introducing a further set of variables. This may indicate a mixed method approach in a subsequent study.

REFERENCES

Coopersmith, S. (1967). The antecedents of self-esteem. San Francisco: Freeman

Lawrence, D. (1981) The development of a self-esteem questionnaire *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 51 241-245

Maines, B. and Robinson, G. (1993) B/G STEEM a Self-esteem Scale with Locus of Control items. Avon: Lame Duck Publishing

Sullivan, H. C. (1999 Unpublished) *An Investigation of self-esteem in pupils attending a school for children with moderate leaning difficulties*

APPENDIX 6

Assessing/Investigating Self-Esteem

Name of Test	Reference	Description	Test: Retest reliability/Comments	Suitable for trialing	Tried	Findings
Lawseq - slightly adapted	Lawrence, C. (1996) Enhancing Self-Esteem in the Classroom. Dorwyn, Great Britain. P17/18	• 16 questions- Yes/No • easily administered to groups • easily marked	In MEd diss. Found 0.7 correlation over 3 week period.	Yes	yes	• A.L. says "blunt tool" • "worked" in MEd.
B/G-STEEM	Maines, B. and Robinson, G. (1993) B/G-Steem a Self-esteem Scale with Locus of Control items. Lame Duck Publishing, Avon.	• Designed to be used by children as young as 6yrs and in British schools. • Easily administered to groups • Easily marked	Test: Retest correlation - Primary sample – 0.73 Secondary sample – 0.84 **Copyright free and readily available**	Yes	yes	"worked" well and very easily administered.

Name of Test	Reference	Description	Test: Retest reliability/Comments	Suitable for trialing	Tried	Findings
Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith) 3 versions	Coopersmith, S. (1981) The Antecedents of Self-Esteem. Freeman, California.	• Ticking statements "like me"/ "unlike me" • Used with U.S children 8-10yrs.	• Version 1- 30 fifth graders .88 over 5 weeks. • Version 2- 56 children .7 over 5 yrs. • Version 3- Standardisation reasonable, Validity –questionable (Hattie)	Poss.- need to obtain copyright permission	no	-
The Piers-Harris self-concept scale. 1964 and 1984- on line	Piers, E.V. and Harris, D. (1969) The Piers Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Counsellor Recordings and Tests, Nashville, Tenn.		Reliable according to Hattie "Evidence for validity is promising".	Too expensive	no	-
Semantic Differentials – i) Osgood, Measurement of Meaning	Osgood, C., Suci, G. And Tannenbaum, P. (1957) The Measurement of Meaning. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill.	Variation of adj. Discrepancy. Adjective is compared with its opposite.				-

Name of Test	Reference	Description	Test: Retest reliability/Comments	Suitable for trialing	Tried	Findings
Adjective checklists	Gough, W.G. and Heilbrum, A.B. (1965). *The Adjective Checklist Manual.* Palo Alto: CA: Consulting Psychological Press		• Validity? • Reliability?		no	-
Q-Sorts		Sorting of self-statements to describe self then compared with those describing ideal self, measuring the discrepancy. More than 20 sets of cards found in the literature. Used to demonstrate improvement after therapy.	• Very time consuming	no	no	-

Name of Test	Reference	Description	Test: Retest reliability/Comments	Suitable for trialing	Tried	Findings
Projective Tests	Rorschach – see Fisher, J. And Cleveland, S.E. (1965) Body Image boundaries and sexual behaviour. Thematic Apperception Test – Murray, H.A. (1943) *Thematic Apperception Test*. Behaviour Interpretation Inventory – Moeller, G. And Applezweig, M.H. (1957) Machover, K. (1949) *Personality Projection in the Drawing of the Human Figure:*..Charles C. Thomas,		• Subjective • Training needed	No	no	-
Personal Orientation Inventory	Shostrom, E. L. (1972). *Personal Orientation Inventory Manual.* San Diego: Education and Industrial Testing Service.			expensive	no	-
Song and Hattie Test.	Hattie, J. (1992) Self Concept. Erlbaum, New Jer.		For adolescents only. Concepts in questions are too complex for pupils with LD.	No	no	-

Name of Test	Reference	Description	Test: Retest reliability/Comments	Suitable for trialing	Tried	Findings
Self-Descriptive Questionnaire	Marsh, H.B. (1988) *The Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ): a theoretical and empirical basis for the measurement of multiple dimensions of preadolescent self-concept: A test manual and a research monograph.* San Antonio: The Psychological Corporation.	4 versions for various ages. 5 point scale to reply to statements. Academic and Non-academic (physical, appearance, peers, parents, general.)	Too many items- at least 76	?	no	
Actual: Ideal Self Measures		Compares ideal self with actual self description.	Needs individual admin.	No	**no**	-
Group Interviews		• Loosely structured	• Completely subj. • Revealing • Complements statistical methods • Highlights pupils who are suitable for individual interviewing	Yes	yes	• Be prepared to ask more direct questions

Name of Test	Reference	Description	Test: Retest reliability/Comments	Suitable for trialing	Tried	Findings
Individual Interviews			• To enlarge on issues arising in group interviews	Yes	yes	• Some very revealing comments from the pupils. • Very time consuming doing the transcript.9hrs to do 1hr of tape. • About 1/3 of conversation was "useful" • Would use in conjunction with statistical tests.

Name of Test	Reference	Description	Test: Retest reliability/Comments	Suitable for trialing	Tried	Findings
Pupil's drawings + commentary		• Pupils draw pictures of something that happened in previous school or earlier in current school • Comments to the teacher about the picture were recorded		Yes	**yes**	• Comments were more revealing than the pictures • Quite difficult to motivate the drawing, initially some refused – but only one was steadfast. • Quite time consuming for the "returns" • Drawings definitely enhanced talk • Pupil lead
Pupil's drawings + discussing them without adult present		• Pupils in pairs talked about their pictures in private but conversations were taped with their permission		Yes	yes	• Pupils easily distracted • Not so data rich
Individual private accounts		• Pupil spoke into a tape recorder individually and in private, about school experiences. They knew I would listen to them afterwards.		Yes	**yes**	• Only tried very briefly with one pupil, but I think it could have great potential as follow up to group interview.

APPENDIX 7

Request for consent to take part in the pilot studies: Letter to parents

24.06.03.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Heather Sullivan, the teacher of Class 7, is carrying out some research under the auspices of Birmingham University. One aspect of the work involves talking to pupils about their experiences at [redacted] nd at any previous schools they have attended. Some work will be with individual pupils and some with small groups. Some of the older pupils may be asked to complete a questionnaire to assess their self-esteem. The research cannot proceed without both your **and** your son's/daughter's permission. The purpose of the sessions will be explained in appropriate terms to the pupils before each session and it will be explained that they can refuse their permission at any stage and that there will be no adverse consequences for them. The sessions, whilst providing the necessary data, will also be educational for the pupils in that that they will satisfy many Speaking and Listening targets in the National Literacy Strategy. It is not expected that your child would be involved in more than one or two sessions of a maximum of 50 minutes. A few individuals may be selected for slightly more than this. It is envisaged that the sessions will take place during the next two years.

In giving your permission it will be assumed that you also give permission for the collected data to be published, though of course the identities of pupils and of the school would be completely confidential.

I do hope you feel able to give permission for your child to be included in this research. If you require further details please contact Heather Sullivan at school.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Headteacher.

I give permission for my son/daughter _____ to take part in the research as outlined in the attached letter. I understand that I can withdraw this permission at any stage. Signed _____ Date. _____

APPENDIX 8

Notes on plans as of 16.09.03

Heather Sullivan 16.09.03

Since June 2003

- 8 pupils (Yr 8/9) drawing pictures of "something that happened in their previous school or earlier in current school. Teacher jotted down their comments about the picture.
- 4 pupils talked to each other in private, (but recorded), about their pictures.
- B/G-STEEM Test done with 7 pupils. (used primary scale) 5 boys out rated the 2 girls) .
- 2 sessions of group interview/discussion. Transcribed and some light analysis.
- Grid of methods of assessing/investigating self-esteem/concept.

Immediate Plans:

- Use B/G-Steem on larger and different group of children (MLD only, not ASD or SLD)
- Do another group interview with different pupils, using a "refined" list of questions and more "pointed" questions.
- Give individuals the opportunity to record in private as follow up to group interview.
- Phone some parents, particularly of "MLD only" pupils who have not given permission for me to work with their children.
- Make initial moves to find pupils in mainstream to "match"

Longer term plans:

- To use B/G-Steem on 50 MLD pupils in MLD Special school
- To find matched group in Mainstream
- To use sample group interviews and follow up individual interviews, and some private recording methods with samples from each group.
- To interview ex-pupils (recently and less recent leavers) about their experience of Special education.

APPENDIX 9

Record of Supervision 19.02.04

RECORD OF SUPERVISION

Student: Heather Sullivan **Time/Date of supervision:** 12:30pm 19/2/04

1. Work undertaken since last supervision:

- Paper on validity/reliability submitted, fed back, redrafted, resubmitted
- Paper on mini-project data collection submitted, fed back
- Attended Steve Rayner seminar on inclusion
- Attended EndNote training and purchased software
- Attended InVivo training
- Attended Research Student Workshop on Data Analysis

2. Comment on current work including any difficulties experienced

- Currently attending Subj. module Ed. Dis. & Sp. Needs
- Decided focus for research should move from self-esteem to "pupils and ex-pupils experiences of special school".

3. Other issues discussed at supervision

- Need to read about identity theory
- Idea of piloting 3 different methods of collecting data from pupils, perhaps to use "cue cards in existing form and two adaptations of them.

4. Work to be undertaken for the next meeting, including any submission date and supervisor response:

- Complete supervision record
- Read Begley chapter and Crozier chapter in Lewis and Lindsay, "Researching Children's Perspectives"
- Read Benjamin, S.
- Read Mead, Gergen, K. and Goffman, Thomas, G.
- Submit short, early paper on social models of identity.
- Revise and submit 500 word proposal for pilot/data collection

5. Focus of next meeting:

- Paper on social models of identity
- Proposal for pilot study

6. Date and time of next meeting 2:00pm Wed. 24th. March 2004

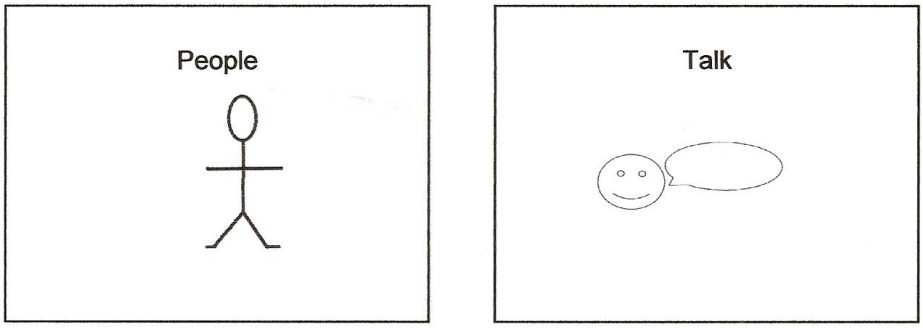
Filled in by:
Heather Sullivan
A copy of this form should be kept by supervisor and student

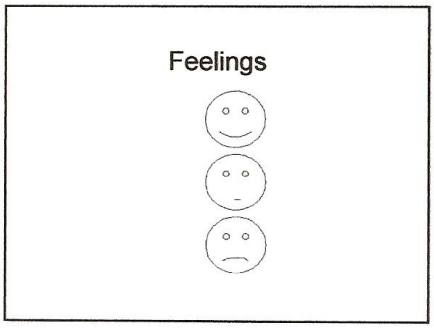
64

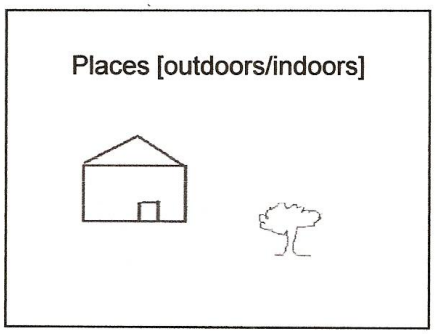
APPENDIX 10

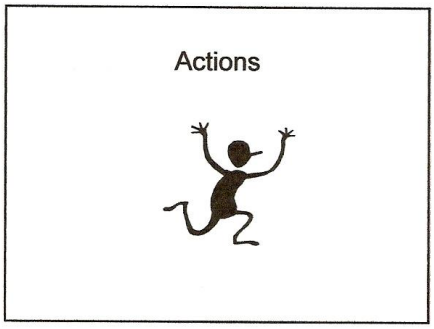
Cue cards: (Not to be copied without prior permission from:

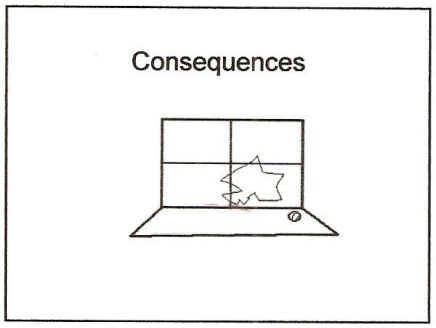
Prof. Ann Lewis, School of Education, Birmingham University, Edgbaston, Birmingham. UK.)











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APPENDIX 11

Response from school governors consenting to work

DATE: 7th May 2004

TO: **Heather Sullivan**

FROM: [redacted]

Use of Students in Research

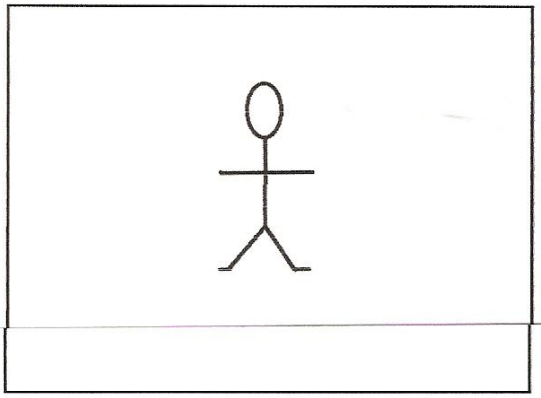
This is to confirm that the governing body has considered your request, as outlined in your letter, to carry out small scale research using students as participants.

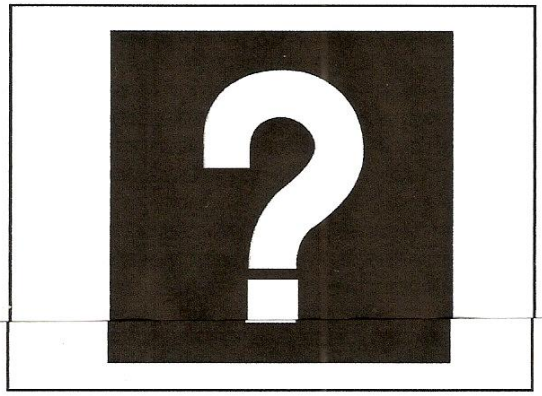
I confirm that they have approved your proposal and am sure that they will be very interested in your findings and may ask you to make a small presentation.

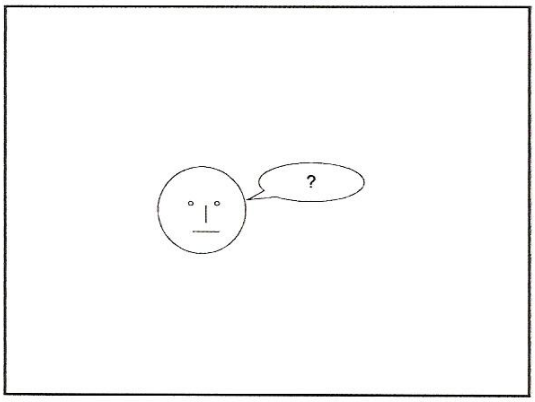
Good luck with the project!

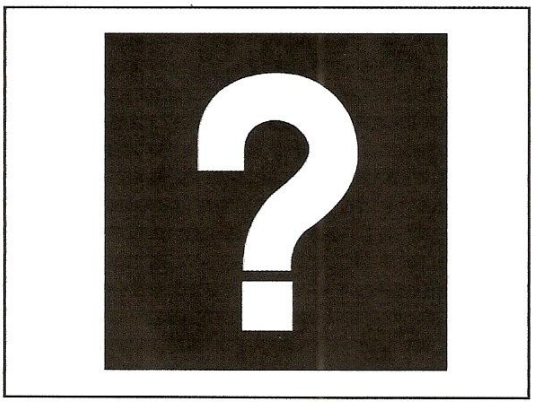
APPENDIX 12

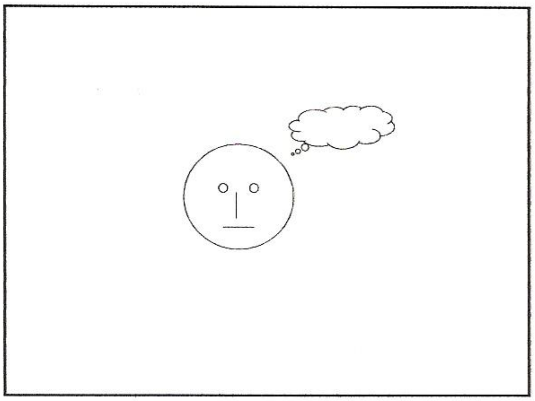
Amended Cue cards

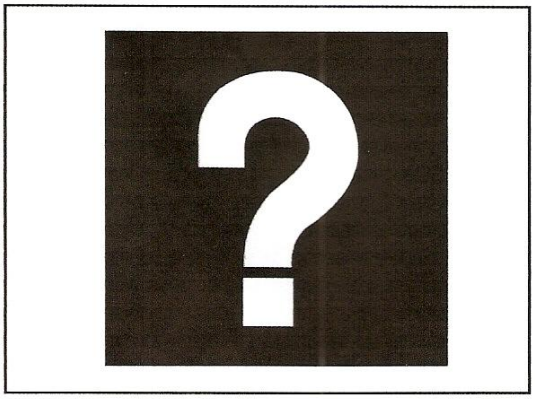


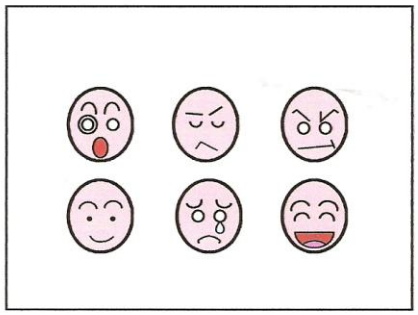


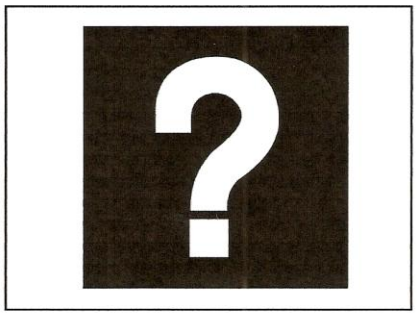


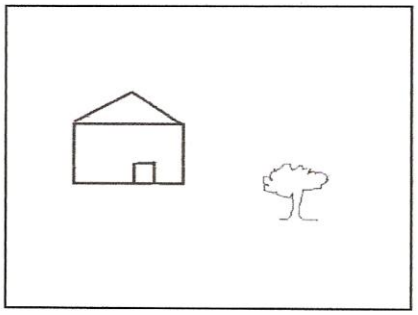


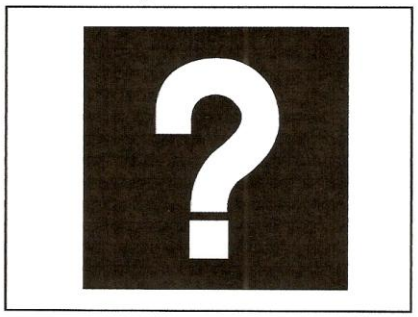


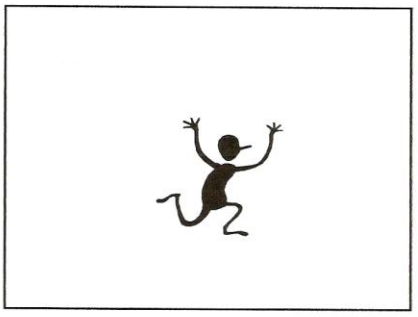


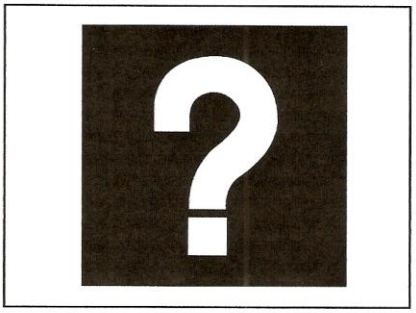












APPENDIX 13

Detailed description of the first four training sessions, the amendments that were subsequently made to the cue cards and the way they were presented

Detail of first four cue card training sessions

The group had recently studied a module in religious education on the topic of 'symbols', this eased the introduction of the cue cards and their symbolic nature. I explained that the symbols were to help them get better at describing things that had occurred, either recently or a long time ago, without me interrupting them and without them missing anything out. I used a storyboard, picture story, (a simple story told in a series of six pictures without words), and showed how the cue cards could be used to help retell the story.

There were five sessions of training, each lasting about one hour and during which I adapted the cue cards and altered the procedure of presenting them in the following ways:

- I felt that the 'feelings' card, which consisted of a happy face, a sad face and a neutral face, actually limited the emotions which the interviewee was able to talk about and that when presented with the card the pupils usually said 'happy' or 'sad' i.e. selecting one of the emotions shown. This card was substituted with one showing a range of emotions.

- Sometimes the pupils were content to give one word answers to cues, and I felt a 'slight nudge' would elicit more. So I inserted a card showing a question mark after every card and trained the pupils that this meant, 'Can you think of anything else to say about this?

- I introduced a card for ‘What was the character thinking?’, as I felt this would elicit more data.

After each session the pupils and I discussed the cards and several changes arose out of these discussions. They had difficulty with understanding the concept of ‘consequences’. We discussed what this meant and jointly developed a symbol that they felt would ‘cue’ them better. During sessions it became apparent that the pupils were using, or attempting to use, the written heading on each card to guide them as to what they were to speak about rather than using the symbol, sometimes this led them to be cued erroneously. I subsequently removed the headings (see Appendix 12 for amended cards).

Each session was audio-recorded, I would have found it very difficult to remember what had gone on without the recording, or to have made notes during the sessions. However my main aim was to remove myself from the process completely, that is not to say anything or to be in the room. This I felt would produce the ‘purest’ account from the pupil. To this end I produced a ‘PowerPoint’ presentation of the cards and trained the pupils to progress through the presentation unaided.

APPENDIX 14

Details of results of the fifth training session using cue cards including transcripts

17/11/04 5th Session of training with cue cards

Preparation

For this, the fifth session, the following changes were made to the cue cards.

1. The captions were removed from the cue cards
2. The mouths on the "talk" and "thinking" cards was "neutralized"
3. An array of 6 emotions was substituted for the "feelings" card.
4. The "consequences" card was abandoned.

The cards were used in "Power Point" format (see attached)

The 4 pupils were interviewed individually. They were reminded of the slides by running through them with the teacher and the new "feelings" slide was introduced and explained. It was then explained that they were to tell the teacher something that had happened at home or in school recently "perhaps last week". They were asked to first tell the story and that the teacher would not interrupt at all except to ask if they had finished. Then they were to be asked to tell about the same event but using the cue cards on the "Power Point" presentation, and that they would operate the speed at which they went through the presentation. The teacher would not interrupt nor answer questions except to ask if they had finished. The pupils were thanked at the start and end.

Transcript – the number of dots is an indication of the relative length of silence.

RB:

(Without Cue Cards)

Well… last Wednesday it was my birthday…nnn…had a good day at school… saw my mate, Saturday night I went to a bonfire…'n then I went 'ome 'n bed, and woke up Sunday…..'n then ……'n then (*indistinguishable*) all my mates……..errrrrrr…… cum

school next day…..'n then …….er .. I went to my brother's ex-girlfriend's house 'n then (*indistinguishable single word)* ..about…'n then coming to school today…….. .

TEACHER: have you finished?

RB: Ye.

RB

(With cue cards and RB operating the power point presentation of cue cards)

Er.. the people what went was me, Iola and Quentin, and Martin, Ewan, Nicola, mm, Leslie 'n Tim. 'nd some other people .. can't remember their names, .. and my brother Scott my sister and his mates…….. no……. erm……..my mate Nathan's two brothers and sisters were following us around…'n he….that's why he kept on saying "stop following us"……..'nd so they left near the end …… …….My mate Iola saw her mates ..'n just thinking of ideas what to do …… ……and we was all 'appy. My mate,. Iola was probably a bit upset 'cos someone lost a teddy that I won 'er. ……..and it was outside on a big massive field…… there was a fair there erm…and fireworks ……..don't know……..massive field……no …an the action was just goin' on all the rides. That's about it.

TJ

(Without cue cards)

Er yesterday I was on my bus and I was sitting by this boy.. and he was looking out the back window….and he started pulling my erm …coat hood and it got out of hand so he was pulling me down and it was hurting me..so…he got told off so The I got a quid…….. and yesterday I found out that we weren't having a puppy…… and er my ex-boyfriend came ….. I……wished him Happy Birthday for Friday……..that's all.

TJ

(with cue cards and TJ operating the power point presentation of cue cards)

OK then erm……right there was Naomi, Tim Smith, he's six years old, there was me, Naomi was sitting by Tim 'n I was sitting on my own. Me and Tim was sitting looking out the window… and it got out o hand he started pulling my coat so …….. …… and Terry's wife was on the bus and she saw Sam, so I asked Naomi to erm ……. To get Tim off me 'cos it was hurting my throat.. 'cos my jacket was zipped up to the top ….. I couldn't breathe 'cos I couldn't ……

……. . I thought my windpipe was going in, but it wasn't it was just really tight……

……..erm, ……. I was sad ….and I started crying… so I told my bus people it was just wind……in my eyes…… It was inside….on the bus on the way… to Tara's house…… ……..

……

…… and he got moved to the front and …….. I stayed at the back……Terry came to see if I was all right ……. It all ended when we got off the bus so…….

RW

(without cue cards)

……..(*prompt to start from teacher*) …….erm I was helping my Dad feed all the cows….ye. feed all the cows and sheep. Erm…….

……
……
……..Iwas feed more cows cross by the farm 'n……..

…… and I was on the goat.. go-cart on Saturday and Sunday 'n then ……. Then Fri. ..ye Friday I went to the bike sale with Dad 'n then …… nothing.

RW

(with cue cards and with RW operating the power point presentation of cue cards)

Right on Friday I went to bikes with Dad …and then …….and then …… ……. Looking at bikes ‘n then …….. different bikes ‘n then.. ……erm……. Then we had lunch er…… people talking ……..

…….

……. Ssss……..Saturday ….went on my go-cart…… petrol …….put petrol in the go-cart …….. then Sunday I went on it again…….. then last night……..erm……..

…….

…….. thinking about g..it’s a good bike……. It’s a good place to…….

…….. I was happy going ……..

…….. (*2 indistinguishable words*) …….. it was on the door…….. that’s it now, that’s it now, action….. the action was……

……. People were walking……walking about.

HE

(without cue cards)

On Sunday I went with guides to a (*2 or 3 indistinguishable words*) with people who died in the war….and…..I went in the church with my friend…….. and …….and we sing songs and…..we had a service in the church then we went outside and we……. Marched back to the place where we started and…….we had drink and crisps and I went back home…that’s it.

HE

(with HE operating the power point presentation of cue cards)

On Sund……On Sunday I went …I watched with my guides…. With… my friends from guides and …….we marched from British Legion to St M church ……..

…… we went to the service….and the people who died in the war …….

……we we did sing….. hymns and prayers and ….. and the (*indistinguishable word*) …and we went inside at the church…….. and……and…….. I saw the poppies…….. I was happy….. I… we sang a song and we marched past.. ……..it was at the church …….. and we marched through town past T(supermarket) and to the (*3 indistinguishable words)* to have a drink and crisps……in the town …..with parents and children…… that's it.

Results

pupil	Words without cue cards	Words with cue cards	Items of information without cue cards	Items of information with cue cards
RB	65	134	17	24
TJ	82	169	14	29
RW	55	86	11	20
HE	66	108	15	22
TOTALS	**278**	**497**	**57**	**95**

Some Analysis

The use of cue cards came close to doubling both the number of words spoken and the amount of information delivered.

We have to remember though that in each case the use of cue cards **followed** the telling of the story unaided and that therefore the subjects may have "warmed" to their story by this time. It would not have been sensible to use the cue cards first though.

With the cue cards the subjects became much more focused in what they were telling. In other words they selected one aspect of the event they had already told and described it in much more detail. One can imagine how useful this would be in forensic work, especially if the interviewer directed the subject to the aspect where more detail was required.

Three to four months had elapsed since the last session of cue card training with these 4 pupils. Their memory of what the cue card was supposed to prompt was varied. One had little memory but the other three remembered them well. They confused "thinking" and "feelings" again, perhaps these are hard to separate in their minds, but this didn't matter as details of both were given. Often something on the slide seemed to prompt them to say something that wasn't suggested by the slide but this did not matter as long as the flow of information continued.

Heather Sullivan

24.11.04

APPENDIX 15

Example Of pupil's ranking of items they'd mentioned in conversation- in order of importance to them

APPENDIX 16

Record of Supervision 30/11/04

RECORD OF SUPERVISION

Student: Heather Sullivan **Time/Date of supervision:** 2 pm Tues.30th Nov. 2004.

1. Work undertaken since last supervision:

- Completed and submitted Record of Supervision
- Contacted founding head re interview for research but unable to help
- Other two heads willing to be interviewed
- Carried out and reported on 5th and final cue card training session
- Submitted plan for listening to foster daughter
- Submitted plan of where I am in overall EdD. prog.
- Subject assignment on rights of non-disabled people to research disability started.

2. Comment on current work including any difficulties experienced

Disappointment re founding head not being willing to talk but discussed ways around this- founding deputy is probably contactable.

- Interesting results from final cue card session especially re. statistical data

3. Other issues discussed at supervision

- Agreed plan for first stage of talking to ex-pupils of Special School and that I would now commence this
- Agreed that overall EdD progress was on target

4. Work to be undertaken for the next meeting, including any submission date and supervisor response:

- Submit assignment for " Social Justice and Disability Module"
- Attend "Theoretical Perspectives: Learning and Transformation" module
- Commence assignment for above
- Purchase digital recorder
- Carry out first(possibly subsequent) interview/s with foster daughter
- Transcribe and analyze data

5. Focus of next meeting:

- Discussion of analysis of first (and possibly second) session with foster daughter.
- Discussion of some issues around participatory research
- Subject module assignment

6. Date and time of next meeting 2pm Wed. 13th April 2005

APPENDIX 17

Detailed proposal for Pilot Study 3

Plans for listening to ex, and current pupils of an MLD school.

I am interested in how ex-pupils and current pupils perceive their education in a "special" setting to have influenced their lives, particularly compared with how they feel things would have been different had they attended a mainstream setting. Whether they felt excluded or "other", stigmatized, included, both during their schooling and since. How they felt/feel within their families, workplace, amongst friends. Whether feelings have changed, how did they feel when first going to a 'special" school, after some time, on leaving and since. How aware of the separate nature of their education they were.

Another cohort of pupils is available who left the school in the 1990s as is a group who currently attend the school.

Plans

To " interview" the three cohorts as follows:

1. My foster daughter who was a founding pupil to discuss the research
2. Analysis
3. Foster daughter individually
4. Analysis
5. Feed back from foster daughter individually and discussion of analysis
6. Planning with more from her cohort –as a group of 4 or 5. If more are available a further session involving 4 or 5
7. Interviewing this cohort as a group
8. Analysis
9. Feed back to/from group, planning for individual interviews
10. Analysis
11. Interviewing individuals from these groups
12. Analysis
13. Planning with whole group to decide whether feedback should be to/from individuals or as a group or a mixture of both.
14. Feedback as decided @ 13.
15. Analysis
16. "Winding up" session

N.B. this will probably involve more than 14 sessions as each individual will mean a separate session so there may be several stages between 11 and 12, and between 13 and 14.

I feel the meetings should be arranged at fortnightly intervals, thus allowing time for analysis by me and reflection by the other participants, but not too long a time which may cause the participant's interest to flag. The process thus far would therefore take a minimum of 30 weeks and probably a year.

I think that stages 1-5 could start as soon as format is agreed with AL. The outcome of these stages would give me a good idea of whether the following stages were possible- they, together with stage 6 would constitute a pilot study, the data from which would nevertheless be used as part the final work . If proceeding seems advisable I should start stage 6 during Summer/Autumn 2005, hopefully concluding it around Jan/Feb 2006.

I would then decide whether to repeat the process with the "90s leavers" cohort or proceed to going through a similar, but not the same process with a cohort of current pupils.

It is planned that the interviews will be semi-structured and that the work will be, to an extent, participatory in that aims, methods and analysis will be shared with participants and will all be liable to "evolve" due to their input.

Questions/discussion for stage 1

1. Share the aims of the work as- "Wanting to find out how you and your friends felt about being in a special school and how it has affected you since."
2. Listen
3. Share how I have planned to do this and ask what she thinks about that.
4. Listen
5. "How would your friends feel about these plans?"
6. Listen
7. "How do you think we could get them talking about these sorts of things?"
8. Listen
9. "What are the questions I shouldn't ask or things I shouldn't say?"
10. Listen
11. "Are there some things I should ask them as individuals or as a group, how would they feel most comfortable."
12. Listen.
13. Discuss logistics, how who, where, when, transport, difficulties, solutions.
14. "Is there anything you want to say?"

15. Listen
16. Thank you

N.B I have included the "Listen" direction to remind me that listening is active and that I will have supplementary questions as a result of her responses.

Stages 2 & 3

Stage 3 will of course depend on stages 1 and 2, but it is necessary to have some idea of the questions I might ask.

1. Tell me about the first things you can remember about going to school.
2. If you didn't start at T. School tell me what you can remember about first hearing about going to T. School.
3. Tell me about what you can remember of starting at T. School.
4. Do you know why you came to T. School?
5. How did you feel about coming to T.?
6. What did your family think about you coming to the school?
7. What did your friends in the old school think about you leaving to come to T.?
8. Tell me about your early time at T..What was good/not so good?
9. Tell me about your friends at T.
10. Tell me about children you knew that didn't come to T. School.
11. What happened to your friends from the old school?
12. Tell me about your last couple of years at T.
13. How did you feel when you left T.?
14. What did you do after leaving T.?
15. Tell me about the people where you went after leaving T.
16. What did you do in your spare time after you left T.
17. Tell me about your family at this time?
18. Tell me about your life since then.
19. What do you think about going to T. School?

There will of course be supplementary questions for further explanation and expansion throughout.

It is planned that the group interviews should be more "open"/relaxed with old photographs as a focal point and questions similar to those above being asked as appropriate of the whole group at first with possible follow up requests for clarification/explanation/extension.

Ethical Issues

There are many ethical issues to be addressed. I will do this separately. Not least is the issue of the nature of the relationship between my foster daughter and me. Some of the questions are about the time when she lived with me. She may not want to raise some issues about this time and we need to talk about how we deal with this before it arises.

Currently we talk on the phone about every three weeks and see each other about once every two months. Though we are always available in emergencies and for advice. My adult children see her and are in contact with her at least as much as I am. She also maintains contact with my ex-husband. Her two children are our grandchildren. The relationship is very much mother/daughter though not so intense but reinforced by the fact that I teach in her old school. I suspect that this work will bring us closer, I have previously helped her with studies she has done with WEA and I think she may enjoy the possibility of now helping me with my studies. There are therefore issues about what happens when it is over.

I will write more extensively about ethical issues elsewhere.

APPENDIX 18

HIERARCHICAL FOCUSING INTERVIEW SHEET

1.Tell me anything about T (Special) school.

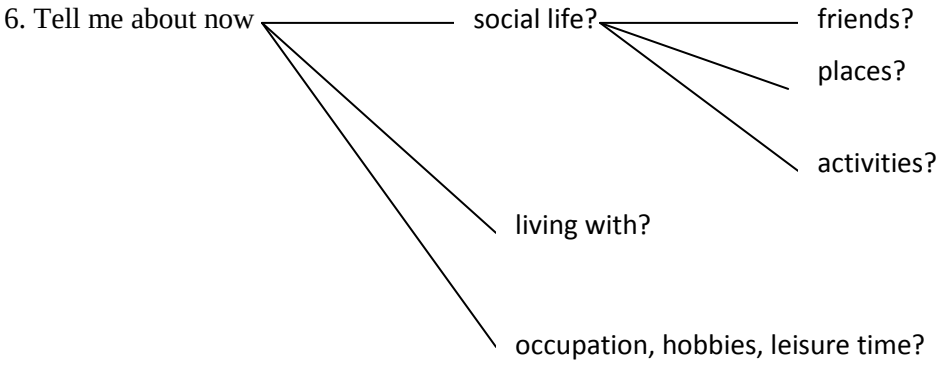
2. Ex-pupils experiences of mainstream ed.

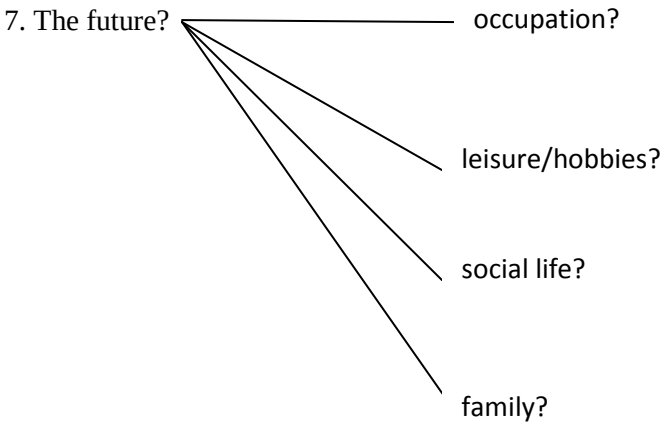
Tell me about before you came to T (special) school
- home
- school
- family

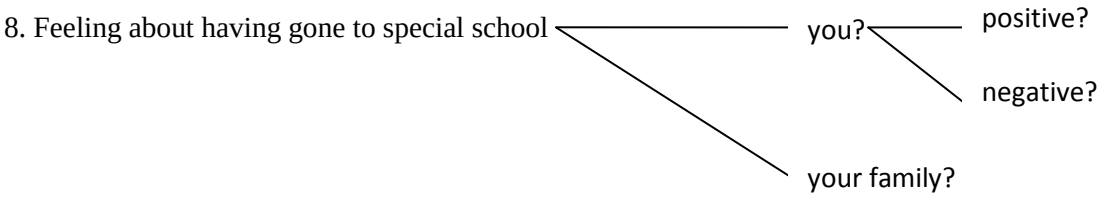
3. Tell me about starting special school
- How did vou find out?
- Why do you think you came here?
- Did anyone explain?
- Family's reactions?
  - parents?
  - siblings?
- Other children
  - old school?
  - neighbours?
- What did you notice about sp sch?
  - different?
  - same?

4. Tell me about special school memories
- lessons?
- other times?
- good things?
- bad things?
- friends?

5. Tell me about leaving school
- education/job?
- living with?
- social life?
  - friends?
  - places?
  - activities?







9. Would you change anything about your education if you could go back?

APPENDIX 19

Sample transcript of conversation

Transcript of conversation with M. 4/06/07 Folder B 01

Transcript
As the interview started there was a problem with recording which was sorted quickly but meant first 30 seconds was lost. R: Sorry about that M. I think we're back on track now. So this is on B first file.OK. Do you mind starting again to tell me what you said? M. From the beginning? R: Yes M: Err I left me other school and joined T. school(special) The first day was a bit scary but I soon made new friends and all the teachers was very nice. Err and errr I liked lessons and they was quite easy. Err the work was very easy as well. And err I liked art, I didn't like art.. errr woodwork, but I liked errr… now I do a lot of woodwork at home now. I just didn't know errm what to plan I dr.. err I did a… err… now I know a lot of things. Errr but I errr … met errr C and G (other girl pupils) errr….. my best friends, I still keep in contact from this day. And err they was errr …. It's all changed now but it was brilliant, easy to work but (indistinguishable). And errr I liked the err Christmas time because we had like Christmas meals and everything like that. Errm even the (indistinguishable) was lovely it was nice. Err… it was errr I went trips and day trips and we went err … I think we went err.. holidays but I don't think I ever did actually. But err it was really e….. err excellent time. And errr I like errr history and errr… everything and it was great fun I really really had a great time at school. Errrm… I really can't remember anything else I … errr… R: Tell me about how you came to come here. (special school) M: Err I don't think I could … (indistinguishable) … two words spell or lack of confidence as well I think and errr… errr reading, I couldn't read, err couldn't sp… errr speak properly I don't think. Errr oh what else errr .. R: How old were you when you came? M: (Laughs) Was I seven? R: Whose class did you go into?

M: Oh no. You asking me… no …. I don't remember that one.

R: No.

M: No (indistinguishable)

R: Do you remember which classroom it was in? Which room it was?

M: Errr it was middle sized like it was little…

R: Right.

M: Little ones…

R: So about seven?

M: I don… errr ye probably about seven. And then I've got another st…. and then (indistinguishable)… Mr. W. (an ex teacher in the special school)… I see him the other day actually.

R: Do you remember which school you went to before you went… came to T (special school)?

M: Errm W(local mainstream primary) errr W errr school.

R: Tell me about W. school then.

M: Errrm don't remember much. I don't remember much. Errrm. But I errr errr …. There was one teacher… and I used to do the register … I used to take 'em down to the register. Errr but I did this… err the register at errr T (special school) as well didn't I? Errm You know I just helped a lot of things errr….

R: So why do you think you came here then?

M: Just to help errr help me to read and write and errr get some confidence.

R: Do you remember anybody telling you you were going to come here? (special school)

M: Errr…. Mum and Dad.

R: What did they say?

M: Errr I think they said, 'You're going to a new school.' which I was a bit upset actually, But I was errrr OK when I got here (special school) actually. It was quite nice.

R: So and when you came here you say you enjoyed it all and that…

M: Ye.

R: Just tell me the worst thing that ever happened to you.

R: Errr……. really, got beaten by one kid didn't I? Err but the headmaster err sorted it out. Err…… there was no really much errr badness really

because errr errrr I got on with everybody, all the teachers…. All the kids, everybody really.

R: When you left here, what happened then?

M: Err… went to college errr and then… I didn't do anything …. Couldn't get a job because errr … errr… there was no jobs around so errr I just watched TV pretty much. But I then, I then err … my Mum found out about 'Green Gym' and I joined that and then I got like a lot of confidence back again. Errr because errr met a load of new friends after that. Err and then I got a job afterwardT. Errr Oh I went to R. sorry, and errr they didn't help much…but err….

R: Sorry. Who was that?

M: R (name)

R: R?

M: Ye.

R: What's that?

M: Err. I … it was like a training centre. Ye.. and errr they didn't do much. They just didn't help very much at all actually.. but err.. they was changing over. Err they was leaving. Errr they errr just … gone now… I don't know what they're called now but errr…. errr… th… errr they errm errr … got me a job in the pet shop. But they… they was really nice to me the boss was C (boss's name), but unfortunately they was closing down and they err couldn't find me… errr couldn't pay me much 'cos they .. err they got enough staff on err.. they tried really hard but they couldn't do it. 'Cos I was quite a good worker really. Errr but I managed to get a job in The Villa. Errr first they said no to the cleaning job but then err.. I came back as a carer and they said 'Oh we haven' got a cleaner, do you want to do that?' and errr I … I says, 'Ye' 'Cos I wanted the m. err any job, but now I'm still working there and they love me and all the residence love me.

R: What's The Villa?

M: it's a errr old people's home. …. And errr … errr I do clean the (indistinguishable) there, but the residence are lovely and they love me (laughs). And like they got animals and cats and (indistinguishable) err and errr so I been working there for last about five years I would think. Errr and then I do… I need… I do 'Green Gym' once a week because they changed over to Tuesday and Thursdays, I used to do Wednesdays and Fridays but now its Tuesday and Thursday but it might change back if it could do it. Errr I do Wednesdays errr but I also do a plot on W. (local area) allotments as well.

R: Ye.

M: I like to do a bit o' growing (laughs). I do a lot of things don't I? (laughs)

R: You do.

M: Errm…

R: What would be… errrm … if I said to you… if you hadn't come to S (special school), and you's stayed at the primary school and then gone on to errr… whatever secondary school…

M: B(names local secondary school)

R: …. had gone to, how would your life have been different?

M: Oh would 'a been very different, because it…. I wouldn't be able to spell.. spell. I don't think I'd be able to do the job errr of cleaning because they do a lot of paper work errr… also errr… errr wouldn't be have no errr… confidence. I suppose I'd probably have been beaten up, because people don't like errr… on W (local area) where I live it's just horrible. Really nasty. (indistinguishable) and errr you gotta be strong and confident errr out there because if you don't you get beaten up every day.

R: So why wouldn't you have been confident if you'd gone to a mainstream school?

M: Well…. It probably be… they'd probably put you down, call you names and ….

R: Why would they do that?

M: Because you know you probably… you don't spell and you can't read (they)'ll pick on you the way (indistinguishable) just are… 'orribble.

R: Did anybody ever pick on you?

M: Errr… on W (local area) ye. Not in T. (special school), no. They love… they loved me. Errr on W (local area) they did.

R: What are these people that live there that go to other schools?....

M: Different schools ye they do but they go … a lot of them…. Er… (M starts to cry) … a lot of them… (M breaks down) …

R: It's OK.

M: …….…….

R: Tissue?.....…… is it OK to carry on recording? Shall I switch it off?

M: Sorry?

R: Do you want me to switch the recorder off?

M: ……. It's OK.

R: Sure?

M: Errrm …….. a lot of them go to err A (local mainstream secondary school). And a lot of them did (indistinguishable) you on the buses. They do pick on ya. A lot. Errrrm … but not anymore.

R: Not any more?

M: No … no.

R: Good.

M: It's better a lot better. It … when (I) was younger, when I gone …… but……

R: Is that while you were here (at special school)?

M: Ay?

R: Did they used to do that while you were here? At the special school?

M: No no I did …. It's to do errr with my reading I think. Errr….

R: Is this when… when was the bullying worst? When you were at the first school or….

M: Errr.

R: … here or… or…

M: It was… it was… going ……. Errrr …….. it was really when I left school I think. Errr 'cos a lot of errr … they used to catch the coach errr… go to S(special school), here, so that took it off …. But when I was younger errr it was more errr they didn't pick on you much 'cos you didn't go out much But errr…. errrrr. (indistinguishable) when you left school it just.. really got bad. (M still upset)

R: Yes.

M: It's errr a lot… it's changing now. And errr… errr. X (local area) is actually changing all errr they've gotta do… we've (indistinguishable) .. any roads and errr (indistinguishable) I think actually X (local area) committed to errr sign agreement saying if you pick on us, be nice to everybody errr even err me, and errr errr so they agreed to that and errr lot of it , but when they errr… when they was…. When they didn't (indistinguishable) it got really bad.

R: Right.

M: Ye errr ….

R: Why do you think it doesn't happen now?

M: because they knocked it down.

R: Oh right. What I mean is why do you think the bullying's gone off now?

M: Errr (indistinguishable) I think I've got more confidence errr…..

R: Where've you got that confidence from?

M: Errr…

R: Where has the confidence come from?

M: Err …

R: Why are you more confident?

M: I errr I joined the 'Green Gym' and errrr… they build on confidence it's errr (indistinguishable)

R: Tell me about 'Green Gym'

M: Ye

R: Tell me about it.

M: Oh 'Green Gym'. Errr we do work… building, st… dry stone walling, errr steps we just done two hundred steps forty steps. And we work as a team. Err and errrr (indistinguishable) goes into it. Errr and errr they errr errr we do courses, we just done a course on errr …… like furniture.

R: Oh right.

M: Errr and then I've done another course on first aid and done errr walks leader, and we do different schools. We go into different schools and we do err dr… like errr, errrr errrr domes, willow domes.

R: Oh yeT.

M: Yes. Errr so we do that and err we do like paths err errr (indistinguishable) paths a way. And we just do like gardens or anything like that. you know. Errr really… (indistinguishable) … err schools, some schools ask us to (indistinguishable)half the…. they don't do anything so we err go round and errr them and we do like a wild… wildlife area … ponds and everything, do it all.

R: They've obviously given you a lot of confidence.

M: Oh ye. Ye.

R: Mmm. Errrm sometimes the people who sort of build schools, make decisions about where children are going to go to school and sometimes they might decide to send somebody who's got difficulties such as the ones that you had like with reading and spelling, they might send them to a special school like the one that you went to or they might send them to a mainstream school, and in the mainstream school they might either be in a little separate part of it…..

M: Ye.

R: …. which is in the school….

M: I know ye.

R: ... or or just in the same classes but getting extra help.

M: Ye.

R: If it was a child of your and you were making the decision what would you choose to send your child to?

M: Errr I would go… definitely go to special school. if you wanted to actually help.

R: Why do you say that?

M: It's all according what the teacher says.

R: Why's that why would you choose the special school?

M: 'Cos .. cos…. I errrr know with friends…. He went to a like a just a.. a.. 'partment on his own and he got totally beaten up. … and the other schools errr….

R: Sorry just ….. so your friend went to …

M: A school….

R: A normal school you say…

M: a 'partment.

R: But a different department.

M: And he says the normal kids beaten on him. They still did. He came round … (indistinguishable) … and then his Mum says tell the errrm the headmaster and he didn't do anything. And he's errr they his … (indistinguishable) … you shouldn't be in this school. if he doesn't want to be here. And he … they send him to a special school and he ended up here I think. (special school). But errr I … definitely pick a n.. like a T (special) school or something like that. 'Cos err it helped me a lot and errr…..

R: How did it help you?

M: ….. now be awful.

R: How did it help you?

M: Eh?

R: How did it help you?

M: Well it helped me with reading. I never… have to do paper work 'n that and errr anything, I can do err reading now. I do a lot of reading with my books

R: Why do you think you couldn't have done reading if you'd stayed at mainstream?

M: Errr Well no I don't think I could have done. … if they haven't got time to sit with you all the kids like. Ye 'cos I had to….

R: So what if they put an extra teacher in to help… to work with you in a mainstream school? Would tha help or not?

M: Well probably would .. what about the other kids?

R: What about the other kids?

M: Well they'd be wanting help as well wouldn't they? There'd be one helping the other and then …. But then what about the others? I mean it's all gonna … what about if they've got loads of kids about thirty one kids need help. And then you haven't got nobody have you?

R: So is the main thing about mainstream schools the fact that there's not enough teachers in them?

M: Ye.

R: If there were lots of teachers in them and you could put as many teachers in as you liked, what would you choose then? …… say it was your child and you were having to decide which school to send them to and they put lots and lots of teachers into the mainstream school, would that make you send them there?

M: Well probably but I mean you did't have no… err no err you know the (indistinguishable) to go on trips or have fun …

R: They don't.

M: And you know I had s… great time here (special school)… it was nice Errr if they do go on trips is that a better school than this one?(special school). You know, and if they got funding for that one or anything like that.

R: What makes a school a better school do you think?

M: Well I … probably got some funding and and you… and you always have errr … trips out and it's better … (indistinguishable)… always have enough special teachers here (special school) to help you. A b… if they got a normal errr errrr b.. school you don't know if that's gonna child's gonna (en)joy that school because he might get beaten up and or even don't have fun anymore. Or even have enough staff to have proper lesson.

R: Right.

M: Ye.

R: So you … so you would always choose a special school.

M: Ye.

R: Right. Errm …….. forgotten what the other question I was gonna ask …. Something came into my head and it's gone out again. Oh… You used the word 'normal', talking about the normal kids in a school, and then… and then somebody such as yourself you were saying. So what does it mean to you if you say someone is normal kid?.....

M: Well…

R: …what do you mean by ‘normal’?

M: …. it probably smart probably got about two GSEs … and everything I suppose. And you know he’s probably going to be quicker than learn and things and probably doesn’t even know want any help. Probably just wants errr just you know errr… errr… errrr… they probably get the time tables an’ that. I couldn’t do it (laughs), I couldn’t get the time table. But err… errrr ‘e, he or she would. You know and just normally (indistinguishable)… and for me I ain’t gonna get it, am I?

R: So do you see that…What do you see yourself as? Normal or not?

M: Well I see myself as normal … but … you know any other kid errrr… probably not (laughs).

R: Why? Why not?

M: Err… well they look at me and they probably think, ‘Huh look at ‘er. ‘Er don’t errr, she can’t get anything, and then start picking on y’. And then that’s it.

R: But you had a great time here (special school) did you?

M: Eh?

R: You had a great time here?

M: (laughs)

R: What was the best thing you ever did here?(special school)

M: Errr here joining the sport/the school (not sure which M said but at the time thought she had said school- hence next question).

R: Mmm. And what was the best thing you did after joining school.

M: (pondering and whispering the question to herself)… loads.

R: Loads right. Tell me some of the loads of things that you really enjoyed.

M: Ye well I enjoyed all of it… all the lessons really. And errr…..

R: What do you remember ‘specially?

M: Errr Oh I remember the art class, they was quite good. I enjoyed that. Err and…

R: Art class?

M: Oh yes poree.

R: What was that?

M: Poree, we did poree, remember?

R: Oh yes.

M: (Indistinguishable) Err drawing, and maths, errr religion errrr……..

…….. and then errr ….. oh, what else we did…. there was loads things, we had science didn't we and French, that French lady came in ye'. Errr errr and then errr Mrs B with cooking, I remember always cooking… cooking things it was (indistinguishable) always get mixed up didn't we? And then errm those nice cakes. Errrm and then errrm… errrm woodwork (indistinguishable) … ended up with a bird table. Wish I'd got one now actually (laughs) Errm and then that's it really.

R: So what would you say if I said what did S (special school)… what was the best thing S (special school) did for you? Or gave you? What was the best thing that you got out of S (special school)?

M: Everything. Errm… well taking things I suppose and many things. The different errr errr lessons ….

R: Learning difficult lessons?

M: You know different lessons like…

R: **Different** lessons?

M: Ye ye. And then the errr. ….

R: What has it given you that you use now? Is there something…..

M: We used to do woodwork and that's come out alright that has 'cos I'm doing woodworking now. And errr errr the art and … and errr music and errr… errrr maths, reading of course and writing errr spelling like. Errm it's better than it used to be (laughs).

R: Some people say that errm if you go to special school you get picked on more because you go to special school, what do you think about that?

M: No I don't think so. No they're wrong I think. No. Errm of course it come out worse for me after school errr but now…. (faltering voice) it's OK.

R: So it.. it… you had these problems of bullying after school when you'd left school.

M: Ye'.

R: Do you think if you'd gone to mainstream school you wouldn't have got bullied?

M: Errm I think it would probably have got worse. Lot worse than… I'd probably have been dead actually. But still.

R: Really?

M: Ye if they know you're struggling they pick on ya. Probably 'd actually been stabbed. … still would've been worse for me. But errr errr … used to be really bad. Got bad… so bad police (indistinguishable) to come. … But errr …

R: So you're sure that wasn't to do with having been to special school?

M: No I thin… No I don't think so, it was probably… (indistinguishable)… what rumours went round…

R: What what sorry?

M. What rumours. Ye ye a lot of rumours… a lot of 'em started to flow round and…

R: You don't need to tell me if you don't want to …

M: No no I don't mind it …. It's all …. Errr (getting upset) …I don't mind… I know I'm criticising W (area where M lives), but it… it's A(local secondary mainstream school) school, a lot of kids (indistinguishable) it's (indistinguishable) … came round …. (indistinguishable) … but er we did call the police ….. I don't errr you can't… you can't do anything can you?

R: No

M: (indistinguishable) errr it sort of err started then then about it stopped then and now because a lot of work is starting and they're gonna… I think they're gonna change things at a (local secondary mainstream school) school but err eventually it errr well it will be better for us. At moment a lot of kids (indistinguishable) bored, they don't know what to do. And err it's errr, now we got a park and stuff and things like that, big (indistinguishable) really.

R: Mmm. Good.

M: Ye.

R: Good. Some people sort of… If somebody asked you which school you went to …

M: Ye.

R: You know somebody you were talking to in where you live….

M: Ye, a lot of people do…

R: … and what do you say?

M: I say T. special school.

R: Ye.

M: And they say, 'What it was like?' And I say it was a brilliant time …(indistinguishable)… I had a great time.

R: Mmm.

M: Err…

R: So you're not ashamed ….. some people say they're ashamed of going….

M: No.

R: …. To special school…

M: No.

R: … and keep it quiet or something.

M: No I don't. No I say always say I rec… actually I recommend it to a lot of friends, say why… you know … go to T. school. see if they help ya. And they always do ….. (indistinguishable) … chosen them now.

R: Good.

M: And errr… I say… they say oh it's great. I had a great time, I think they did as well but I never got contact (laughs).

R: What did you think about when your brother D. and your sister M. came here after you?

M: Well I said to Mum, I says, 'Right he's going to T. (special) school and (indistinguishable) (laughing) … and then they did. And they had a great time as well. I think he talked about trains all the time. (laughs).

R: Yes a lot of the time. So is there anything else that you'd like… 'cos people will read my book and they'll want to know what people think about S (special school) school, so is there anything else you'd like to tell those people who've never been to special school? …… About special school.

M: Errm…

R: What would you like to say to them?

M: Just come. (laughs).

R: Just come.

M: You'll have more… errr you'll have more then. Errr ye. Just come to T (special school), see what they do and I think ye. if you …. People….. if you don't like it then there's something wrong (laughing), but ye. I enjoyed it I really did and if err you should come and see it errr errrm Just see it for themselves really I think. Ye.

R: Well thank you ever so much for that N (sister's name) errr….

M: N.

R: M. sorry…

M: Not N.

R: I know (laughs) You're so much alike actually

M: (indistinguishable)

R: What I'd like to do is to get this typed up if that's OK?

M: Ye.

R: And then I'd like to go through it with you some… another time and say this is what you said and if I've got anything wrong I'd like you to put it right.

M: Ye.

R: … and say I didn't say that or I didn't mean that or I didn't say it. And I'll change it. and then I might ask you to do some sort of little… like games really… I take some of the words that you've used and I ask you say… you know… which one is the most important and put them at the top and then ones that aren't important at the bottom. things like that, little… not games but things that help me to understand exactly how you feel about the place and errr … so I might invite you in about a months time or something like that…

M: Mmm.

R: …to have another sort of time with me.

M: Ye.

R: Another time like this. Would that be all right.?

M: Ye ye ye.

R: Errm…. and errr the other thing… well I'm going to stop recording now…

M: Ye ye.

R: … because I only want to talk to you now about errm … about other people and that so I'll switch that off

END

APPENDIX 20

Sample 'Highlights' sheet corresponding to Appendix 19

Highlights of conversation with M

I left me other school and joined T. school(special) The first day was a bit scary but I soon made new friends and all the teachers was very nice. I liked lessons and they were quite easy, the work was very easy as well. I liked art, I didn't like woodwork, I do a lot of woodwork at home now. I just didn't know what to plan now I know a lot of things. I met D and H (other girl pupils) my best friends, I still keep in contact from this day. It's all changed now but it was brilliant, easy to work, I liked Christmas time because we had like Christmas meals and everything like that. Errm even the (indistinguishable) was lovely it was nice. I went trips and day trips and we went, I think we went on holidays but I don't think I ever did actually, it was really excellent time. I like history and everything and it was great fun I really, really had a great time at school.

R: Tell me about how you came to come here (special school).

M: I don't think I could … (indistinguishable) … two words spell or lack of confidence as well I think and reading, I couldn't read, couldn't speak properly I don't think.

R: How old were you when you came?

M: Was I seven?

Went to local mainstream primary school before that, where I used to do the register … I used to take the register down, but I did the register at T (special school) as well didn't I? You know I just helped a lot of things.

Mum and Dad told you, you were going to special school, 'I think they said, 'You're going to a new school.' which I was a bit upset actually, But I was OK when I got here (special school) actually. It was quite nice.'

R: Tell me the worst thing that ever happened to you.

I got beaten by one kid, but the headmaster sorted it out. There was no really much badness really because I got on with everybody, all the teachers…. all the kids, everybody really.

After I left here I went to college and then I didn't do anything …. couldn't get a job because there was no jobs around so I just watched TV pretty much. But I then, my Mum found out about 'Green Gym' and I joined that and then I got like a lot of confidence back again. Because I met a load of new friends after that. Then I got a job afterwards. Oh I went to S. sorry, and they didn't help much, it was like a training centre, they didn't do much. They just didn't help very much at all actually, they got me a job in the pet shop. They was really nice to me the boss was D (boss's name), but unfortunately they was closing down and they couldn't pay me much because they'd got enough staff, they tried really hard but they couldn't do it. Because I was quite a good worker really. But I managed to get a job in an old peoples' home, The Villa, first they said 'Oh we haven't got a cleaner, do you want to be a carer?' Now I'm still working there and all the residence love me. I been working there for last about five years I would think.

I also do a plot on X. (local area) allotments as well.

R: If you hadn't come to T (special school), and you'd stayed at the primary school and then gone on to whatever secondary school you would have gone to, how would your life have been different?

M: Oh would have been very different, I wouldn't be able to spell. I don't think I'd be able to do the job of cleaning because they do a lot of paper work also wouldn't have no confidence. I suppose I'd probably have been beaten up, because people don't like on W (local area) where I live it's just horrible. Really nasty. And you got to be strong and confident out there because if you don't you get beaten up every day.

R: So why wouldn't you have been confident if you'd gone to a mainstream school?

M: It probably be they'd probably put you down, call you names and ….

R: Why would they do that?

M: Because you know you don't spell and you can't read (they)'ll pick on you the way just are horrible.

R: Did anybody ever pick on you?

M: Ye. Not in T. (special school), no. (they loved me), on X (local area) they did.

R: Are these people that live there that go to other schools?....

M: Different schools yes they do but they go … a lot of them (M starts to cry) … a lot of them… (M breaks down) … go to B (local mainstream secondary school). And a lot of them did (indistinguishable) you on the buses. They do pick on you a lot, but not any more.

R: Did they used to do that while you were here? At the special school?

M: No. It's to do errr with my reading I think.

R: When was the bullying worst? When you were at the first school or here (at special school)?

M: It was really when I left school I think. We used to catch the coach to go to S(special school), here, so that took it off …. But when I was younger they didn't pick on you much because you didn't go out much But when you left school it just.. really got bad. (M still upset).It's changing now. And X (local area) is actually changing all they've got to do… we've (indistinguishable) .. any roads and (indistinguishable) I think actually X (local area) committed to sign agreement saying if you pick on us, be nice to everybody even me, and so they agreed to that and a lot of it , but when they didn't (indistinguishable) it got really bad.

R: Why do you think it doesn't happen now?

M: Because they knocked it down.

R: Oh right. What I mean is why do you think the bullying 's gone off now?

M: I think I've got more confidence …..

R: Where've you got that confidence from?

M: I joined the 'Green Gym' and they build on confidence it's (indistinguishable)

R: Tell me about it.

M: We do work… building, dry stone walling, steps, we just did two hundred and forty steps. And we work as a team and (indistinguishable) goes into it. And we do courses, we just done a course on furniture, and then I've done another course on first aid and done walks leader, and we do different schools. We go into different schools and we do domes, willow domes. We do that and we do paths and we just do gardens or anything like that, some schools ask us to do like a wildlife area, ponds and everything, do it all.

R: Sometimes the people who build schools, make decisions about where children are going to go to school and sometimes they might decide to send somebody who's got difficulties such as the ones that you had with reading and spelling, they might send them to a special school like the one that you went to or they might send them to a mainstream school, and in the mainstream school they might either be in a little separate part of it which is in the school or just in the same classes but getting extra help. If it was a child of your and you were making the decision what would you choose to send your child to?

M: I would definitely go to special school, if you wanted to actually help.

R: Why do you say that?

M: It's all according what the teacher says.

R: Why's that why would you choose the special school?

M: Because I know with friends…. He went to a like a just a department in a mainstream school on his own and he got totally beaten up. And he says the normal kids beat him. They still did. His Mum says tell the headmaster and he didn't do anything. Someone said, you shouldn't be in this school if he doesn't want to be here. And they send him to a special school and he ended up here I think (special school). But I would definitely pick a T (special) school or something like that, because it helped me a lot.

It helped me with reading. I have to do paper work 'n that and anything, I can do reading now. I do a lot of reading with my books

R: Why do you think you couldn't have done reading if you'd stayed at mainstream?

M: Well no I don't think I could have done, if they haven't got time to sit with you all…

R: So what if they put an extra teacher in to help… to work with you in a mainstream school? Would that help or not?

M: Well probably would .. what about the other kids? They'd be wanting help as well wouldn't they? There'd be one helping the other kid but then what about the others? What about if they've got loads of kids about thirty one kids need help. And then you haven't got nobody have you?

R: So is the main thing about mainstream schools the fact that there's not enough teachers in them?

M: Ye.

R: If there were lots of teachers in them and you could put as many teachers in as you liked, what would you choose then? …… say it was your child and you were having to decide which school to send them to and they put lots and lots of teachers into the mainstream school, would that make you send them there?

M: Well probably but I mean you wouldn't have no trips or have fun …

M: And you know I had s… great time here (special school)… it was nice, if they do go on trips is that a better school than this one?(special school). You know, and if they got funding for that one or anything like that.

R: What makes a school a better school do you think?

M: Probably got some funding and you always have trips out and it's better …always have enough special teachers here (special school) to help you. If they go to a normal school you don't know if that child's going to (en)joy that school because he might get beaten up or even don't have fun anymore. Or even have enough staff to have proper lesson.

R: So you … so you would always choose a special school.

M: Ye.

R: You used the word 'normal', talking about the normal kids in a school, and then somebody such as yourself you were saying. So what does it mean to you if you say someone is normal kid? What do you mean by 'normal'?

M: Probably smart, probably got about two GSEs and everything I suppose. And you know he's probably going to be quicker at learning and things and probably doesn't even want any help. Probably just wants errr just you know errr… errr… errrr… they probably get the time tables I couldn't do it, I couldn't get the time table. But he or she would. You know and just normally (indistinguishable)… and for me I'm not going get it, am I?

R: What do you see yourself as? Normal or not?

M: Well I see myself as normal … but … you know any other kid, probably not (laughs).

R: Why not?

M: Well they look at me and they probably think, 'Huh look at 'er. '…she can't get anything, and then start picking on you.

R: What was the best thing you ever did here (special school)?

M: I remember the art class, they was quite good. I enjoyed that. Drawing, and maths, religion, there was loads things, we had science didn't we and French, that French lady came in, and then Mrs C with cooking, I remember always cooking, always get mixed up didn't we? And then those nice cakes. Woodwork, ended up with a bird table. And then that's it really.

R: What was the best thing T (special school) did for you? Or gave you? What was the best thing that you got out of T (special school)?

M: Everything. Well taking things I suppose and many things. The different lessons ….

R: What has it given you that you use now?

M: We used to do woodwork and that's come out alright that has because I'm doing woodworking now. And art and … and music and maths, reading of course and writing spelling, it's better than it used to be (laughs).

R: Some people say that if you go to special school you get picked on more because you go to special school, what do you think about that?

M: No I don't think so. No they're wrong I think. No of course it come out worse for me after school but now it's OK.

R: So you had these problems of bullying after school when you'd left school.

M: Ye'.

R: Do you think if you'd gone to mainstream school you wouldn't have got bullied?

M: I think it would probably have got worse. Lot worse than… I'd probably have been dead actually.

R: Really?

M: Ye if they know you're struggling they pick on you. Probably 'd actually been stabbed. … still would've been worse for me, used to be really bad. Got bad, so bad police had to come.

R: So you're sure that wasn't to do with having been to special school?

M: No I don't think so, it was probably what rumours went round. I know I'm criticising X (area where M lives), but it's B (local secondary mainstream school) school, a lot of kids came round …. (indistinguishable) … but we did call the police, you can't do anything can you? It sort of started then about,… it stopped then and now because a lot of work is starting and I think they're going to change things at A (local secondary mainstream school) school but eventually it will be better for us. At moment a lot of kids are bored, they don't know what to do. And now we've got a park and stuff and things like that, big (indistinguishable) really.

R: If somebody asked you which school you went to, you know somebody you were talking to in where you live….

M: A lot of people do…

R: … and what do you say?

M: I say S. special school. And they say, 'What was it like?' And I say it was a brilliant time …(indistinguishable)… I had a great time.

R: So you're not ashamed, some people say they're ashamed of going….

M: No I don't. No I always actually recommend it to a lot of friends, say why don't you go to T. school, see if they help you. And they always do ….. (indistinguishable) … chosen them now. They say oh it's great. I had a great time, I think they did as well.

R: What did you think about when your brother E. and your sister N. came here after you?

M: Well I said to Mum, 'Right he's going to T. (special) school and (indistinguishable) (laughing) … and then they did. And they had a great time as well.

R: So is there anything else you'd like to tell those people who've never been to special school about special school?

M: Just come.

APPENDIX 21

List of phrases for sorting and diamond ranking from transcript shown at App. 19

Words for sorting and ranking by Mizzie

Having confidence
Being able to read and spell
Being able to speak properly
Getting beaten up
Getting on with people
Friends
Putting you down
Name calling
Being picked on
Bullying
Normal kids
Teachers having time to sit with you
Having fun
Going on trips
Proper lessons
Normal
Not needing help
Smarter
Struggling

APPENDIX 22

Summary of work shared with participants

What's it like to go to special school?

What twenty ex-pupils of a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties said about going to special school.

Heather Thomas
October 2010

Twenty ex-pupils of a special school told Heather Thomas, who was a teacher at the school, about what going to special school was like by:

- being interviewed
- making word lists or drawing pictures
- sorting words and phrases
- putting words and phrases in order of how important they were to them

Heather Thomas collected all the information together and looked to see what important messages there were.

These were then shared with the ex-pupils and with people who could use the information to help them make decisions about special schools and mainstream schools in future.

Heather Thomas used the work to help her get a qualification from Birmingham University called a doctorate in education.

The work will be made into a book and a copy will be kept at the university.

No one will know who the ex-pupils were because all names and the school name and the place names have been changed.

How the ex-pupils felt about being at special school

Not all the ex-pupils felt the same about being at special school.

Some said they liked the special school but they would really have liked to go to mainstream school.

Mostly this group felt that they didn't really feel they belonged in a special school. But they didn't know whether they could go to mainstream school. No one seemed to talk to them about it and they didn't like to mention it. Sometimes they said that even though they thought they might get bullied in mainstream school they would still rather be there. Often they didn't like to tell people they had been to special school.

Some said they loved the special school and didn't want to go to mainstream school.

This group really liked being at the special school. They had tried mainstream school and didn't like it. They really felt they belonged in the special school and didn't mind telling people they went there. They thought that special school was better than mainstream school because they thought the pupils in mainstream schools were often badly behaved and silly.

Some said they loved the special school and they would hate to go to mainstream school.

This group really loved being at the special school. They felt very safe there. They had tried mainstream school and often they had been bullied there and didn't want to try going there again.

Messages for people who make decisions about where people go to school.

1. Talk to all pupils all the time about where they would like to go to school and what they want from their education. The pupils are experts about themselves.
2. Some pupils need more help in mainstream schools. Often there are too many pupils in each class and the adults in the room do not have enough time to give pupils the help they need.
3. Practical subjects like art, CDT, cooking, and visits outside the school are much easier for pupils to learn from.
4. Large spaces and complicated buildings and lots of moving around can make pupils uncomfortable and scared but there also needs to be enough room to be comfortable.
5. Some schools have too many people in them, this can be scary too.
6. Pupils in special schools and mainstream schools need to take the same exams so that pupils and ex-pupils can talk about them together and understand each other.
7. Special schools need to allow more freedom for pupils to do things on their own without being watched all the time, e.g. being allowed to go off the school site sometimes without staff
8. Schools need to make sure there are times for fun. Not everything that goes on in school has to be about the future. Now is important too.

Heather Thomas would like to say a huge 'thank you' to the ex-pupils who took part in this research. You were very generous with your time and put up with long stretches of time between meetings.

I hope that people who make decisions about where people go to school will read what you have said and do at least some of the things you suggested. I will try to make sure as many of those people as possible read what you have said.

I do hope you enjoyed having your say and that you keep having your say. If you think you are not being treated fairly or people are not listening to your point of view get in touch with your local council, or your MP, you can find out how at your local library.

Or you could get in touch with a group called 'People First'. This group is run by people with learning difficulties to help people with learning difficulties. They can be contacted at:

http://www.peoplefirst.org.uk If you haven't got a computer at home you can use one at your local library.

I wish you all well in the future and a great big...

APPENDIX 23

The author's history of disability

My own history of disability:

Encountering disability

Ethical considerations preclude me from describing here all of my encounters with disability. Some of those I have to omit are very relevant to this account. However I have outlined below other events in my life which 'jumped out' when I reflected on my personal history of disability.

As a four year old I remember Eileen Davis (name changed), a girl about three years older than me. She lived three doors away on the same village council estate. I knew she didn't come to the local primary school that I was by then attending, that she was always smiling, and my Mum must have told me that she was 'a bit simple' as this is a phrase I remember hearing when referring to similar people. I remember watching from my garden as a small group of other children were encouraging her to take down her knickers and laughing as she smiled at them. Her mother appeared very quickly and told them off, they ran away her mother turned to me and said that they were very naughty children but that she wasn't telling me off as she could see I wasn't part of it. Later I remember that this girl was away from home in the week time and at home at week-ends. I 'knew' that Eileen was not clever enough to come to my school and that I must be kind to her.

Then there was the boy in the pram. A boy who also lived in the village was always pushed around in a pram, I didn't question this, I just thought he seemed rather big or old for a pram, until our next door neighbour had a new baby. I told her that I thought he looked like the boy in the pram and I was aware that this didn't 'go down very well'. Then there was Miss Driver. Miss Driver lived at the end of our country lane in a derelict house, and had I believed in witches I would have thought she was the village witch. She was laughed at and tormented by village children for her eccentric, lonely and possibly dirty lifestyle. I knew that I mustn't join in with this and that I must be polite when I saw her. Though I don't remember I can only guess that my 'knowledge about Eileen and Miss Driver were learnt from my mother either by example and/or by being told how to behave. At this early stage my taught relationship to them was an amalgam of politeness (not the more complex respect) and pity. And finally there was Peg-leg Humphrey, a man with what to me seemed like a wooden chair leg substituted for his own leg, who lived in a nearby village and could frequently be seen on his adult tricycle going on local errands. I only recollect being envious of his transport.

After that I really have very little recollection of acknowledging disability except fleetingly as some members of my sixth-form entertained the pupils from a local special school until whilst at college I was invited by a friend to help staff a holiday for children with epilepsy from 'disadvantaged' homes in London. I remember huge emotional feelings of pity and wanting to care. I remember discussing the possibility of adopting one of the children with another young member of staff and being told I must be stupid. I remember one girl who arrived very heavily sedated and how she changed as the sedation was gradually removed. I

was highly critical of her mother for wanting to keep her in the sedated state. I remember having a completely unsubstantiated sense of having a superior knowledge of what would be best for these children and wanting to do it. In retrospect I believe my senses were overwhelmed by an emergent and compelling need in me to 'mother'.

By now married and working as a trained teacher but keen to become a parent, my husband and I responded to an advert to provide respite care for a seven year old boy who was extremely active and we believed intellectually impaired. He came to us at holiday times for around a year. Whilst with us he came to behave in a socially entirely appropriate way but on return to his parents he would climb furniture, swear and run out of control into danger. We saw his 'problem' as his parenting.

About three years later we became full time foster parents to a fourteen year old girl who was then attending a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. As foster parents we became very familiar with the school. We thought it was literally a 'wonderful' place, but believed that our foster daughter would have accessed mainstream education had she had 'good' parenting. However we were always grateful for the continuity the all age special school had given her during a tumultuous childhood. We recognized that the head teacher had been her father figure during this time. My husband was then in senior management in mainstream secondary schools in the same authority and we never questioned the existence of the special provision in that authority. A few years later I started to teach at the school and taught there for seventeen years until my very recent retirement.

Whilst there I completed a masters degree in special educational needs and embarked on a doctorate in the same field.

Personally experiencing disability:

Apart from short events in my life when either by illness or accident, brain hemorrhage and broken bones, I was temporarily physically disabled, I do indeed consider myself to be more permanently disabled, just as I consider most people are. I believe that most people are emotionally, psychologically, socially and intellectually 'stunted' to a greater or lesser extent by their experiences and because of this are less able in those areas than they would have otherwise been. I see disability therefore as a continuum on which we all exist. However I acknowledge how axiomatic is just where you are positioned and do not in any way intend to diminish neither the lived experience of people in those other positions nor the superior value of their contribution to this discourse.

Since writing the above piece and reading it some months later I am shocked by the final paragraph and at what I omitted to say. I hope to rectify this below.

I no longer believe in the continuum. The continuum implies rank order, a line to be travelled where some are ahead and some therefore behind, some are superior and some are inferior. I no longer feel the term 'disability' is useful. It categorizes and separates and opens up space for discrimination. For that reason I describe the respondents in this work as

ex-pupils of special school and do not refer to them as having ‘special needs’ or as ‘having intellectual impairment’ or ‘learning difficulties’ or ‘disabilities’, none of these descriptions describes the ex-pupils in this work. They are individuals who have precisely the same needs as all pupils, i.e. to optimize their choices.

I omitted to say what I felt about special schools. I believe that special schools just like other schools are good and not so good. I believe they are better placed than mainstream schools to ‘optimize choice’ for pupils because of the staff: pupil ratio. I believe that mainstream schools given the same ratio could equally meet the needs of all pupils.

I feel that the majority of pupils within the special school in which I work are happier there than they were in their mainstream schools.

I have huge affection for the special school I work in and would hesitate to return to working in mainstream education.

APPENDIX 24

Sample of coding according to Hycner (1985) –Brian

Brian

Transcript	4. Delineating units of general meaning
R: OK so this is B. who's kindly agreed to talk to me. And B.'s twenty and used to come to S. special school until about four years ago, left when you were sixteen. So perhaps we'll start off B, and we've already talked about you can back out at any time…	
B: Ye.	
R: … you don't have to do this and how it's anonymous and confidential and you still agreed to carry on haven't you? … Yes, so thank you for that, but again if you want to stop at any time that's fine. Perhaps you could tell me about when you first came to T. (special school) or before you came to T. Can you tell me about anything you can remember about your school before you came to T.	
B: Ooh before I came to T. (special school) …… well I've been to M. junior school in M (local area), been there for about …….. ……. probably…… about eight years… something like that. Errrm I finished going to M. junior school then I came… then I came to T. (special school), and come to a different school. And different people it was a bit… bit scary… at first, just getting to know people, …… and making new friends. …….. ….. knowing the teachers……	Went to junior school for about eight years before he went to special school- something like that Going to special school was bit scary … at first, just getting to know people and making new friends. knowing the teachers

R: Mmm. B: ……. R: Tell me a bit more about L. (mainstream primary school attended), school, the primary school, OK. (interrupted by visitor to room), OK, hang on a minute. ……. ……. So you went to M. primary school… B: Ye. R: … and you were there until you were eleven were you? B: Ye. R: Probably, so all the others were going to go to which school? B: …….. different schools. R: Different schools. B: Mmm. R: Different secondary …. B: …secondary schools.	Other pupils from junior school were going to go to different secondary schools

R: …what we call mainstream schools.	
B: Ye.	
R: But you came to T. (special) school. Wh… who decided that?	
B: Err…… my f… my parents…….	Parents decided he should go to special school.
R: Right, why did they decide that?	
B: …….. ssss…… they knew I had something wrong…… with me.	His parents knew he had something wrong with him.
R: Right. What was that then?	
B: It took 'em a bit to find out what I had but …… I went to doctors …… to get tests done… 'n the err results came back saying I've got Aspergers syndrome.	Doctors said he has Asperger's syndrome.
R: Right. Do you know much about that? Do you know what that is?	
B: It's … well I know … a bit about it. It's like I can't…… like say if I was on the phone to someone, I can't properly talk, I like get err it errr … stutter.	He knows a bit about it This means he can't properly talk on the phone, he may stutter on the phone for example.
R: Right. Ye. OK. So when did they find that out? Was that before you came to S (special school), or afterwards?	

B: ……. Afterwards…	
R: Afterwards.	They found out he had Aspergers after he went to special school but before he left there
B:… bef… before I left here. (special school).	
R: Before you left here. So when you came here… did they tell you … did anybody tell you why you were coming to this school?..... They didn't know then you'd got Aspergers so ……	
B: No.	
R: …… You didn't… no one told you. Did you wonder why?	No one told him why he was going to special school
B: I wondered why I came here…	He wondered why he went to the school.
R: Mmm	
B: …I just didn't … realize until I was ha… half way through college.	Realised when he was half way through college
R: Right. … And when d… did you realize this was what we call a special school, before you came here? Or did you just think it was another secondary school?	
B: I just thought it was a normal… well a normal secondary school.	

R: Right. When did you realize it was a special school?	Thought the special school was a normal secondary school
B: W… when I saw people with… different difficulties to me like…	
R: Like…	
B: Down's syndrome…	Didn't realise he was at a special school until he saw the other people with different difficulties to him… e.g. Down's syndrome.
R: Right.	
B: …… and c…	
R: Was that as soon as you came here you realized that then?	
B: ……. (ponders)…	
R: Not sure…	
B: …….I didn't click on straight away.	He didn't realise it was a special school straight away.
R: Right, when …wh… how old would you say you were, how long had you been here do you think or how old were you when you did realize?	
B: ……. Probably when I was about f… fourteen.	

R: So you'd been here about three years …	
B: Ye.	
R: …before you realised this was something different. … Wh s… so how do you see a special school …… wh… what do you think a special school is?	Had been at special school for about 3 years before he realised it was a special school i.e. when he was about 14.
B: …… People with learning difficulties ……. Talking difficulties …….. and people who can't write properly.	Thinks special school is a place for people with learning difficulties, talking difficulties and people who can't write properly.
R: Mmm and how did you fit into that?	
B: …….. …….. bit diff… bit difficult.	It was a bit difficult to fit himself into that
R: How did you… did you think this was the right place for you?	
B: …….	
R: …or not?	
B: Well I didn't… I thought it wasn't the right place but…	He thought it wasn't the right place for him.
R: You thought it wasn't…	

B: Ye	
R: …the right place?	
B: (indistinguishable)	
R: When you were here?	
B: Mmm. …… So I was wandering why I was here.	He was wandering why he was at the special school
R: Did you ever ask anybody?	
B: …… no.	He didn't ask anybody
R: And no one told you……. Right. Why do you think you didn't ask?	
B: … 'Cos it m…. may have sounded like a bit stupid….	Didn't feel he could ask why he was at the school because he might have sounded a bit stupid.
R: What, if you'd said, 'Why am I here?'	
B: Ye. ……	
R: …Right. So that must have been very difficult for you. How did that make you feel?	
B: ……. Nervous.	

R: Right. …… That (indistinguishable), how else would you … I mean is that it? Just nervous? Or was there something else that y… because it must have been quite difficult not knowing really why you were here but not wanting to ask anybody. … Did that make it d… life difficult for you… or was it…	This made him feel nervous
B: Made it a bit difficult in a way. Just … …….. …… ……	It made life difficult in a way
R: OK. You just stuck for words are you?	
B: Ye.	
R: Ye. Don't worry about it. So you were at school and you weren't quite sure why you were here and then when you were fourteen you realized it was a special school…	
B: Ye.	
R: …you realized there was lots of people here with learning difficulties, and do you describe yourself as having learning difficulties or not?	
B: Ye… in a… in a sort of way.	Describes himself as having learning difficulties 'in a sort of way'
R: So how would you describe your learning difficulties then?	

B: It's like err …… when I first came here I couldn't read…..	Couldn't read when he went to special school aged eleven,
…….. but I managed to start reading books. Like on break times I started to get more… a bit more experience reading books.	but he managed to start reading books e.g. at break times then started to get a bit more experience reading books
R: Mmm.	
B: …… and learning new things like woodwork, art ……. maths,…. ….. English……..	Learnt new things like woodwork, art, maths, English.
R: But you say you had learning difficulties and one of those was that you couldn't read when you came here so you were eleven. Was there any other way you had a learning difficulty or was that it?	
B: That was it.	
R: That was it. So it was reading…	
B: Ye.	Reading was his only learning difficulty
R: And you didn't realize then that you'd got this thing called Aspergers syndrome, that was when you went to college was it, after you left here?	Didn't realise he had Asperger's until he went to college.
B: Ye.	
R: Right. How did they find that out? Was it the college found out or was it your Mum	

and Dad or your Mum or what?	
B: Errr the college found out. It…	
R: What did they do to find out?	
B: ……. Errr give me…. Well like writing ……	
R: …tests do you mean?	College gave him tests to diagnose his Asperger's.
B: …tests 'n that.	
R: Right. ……Ye…. And what did that… did that make a difference to you when you knew you'd got something called Aspergers syndrome … or……?	
B: …….. mmm not really…	Didn't really make any difference to him when he found out he had Aspergers
R: No.	
B:…I was just trying to understand it.	He was trying to understand it
R: Right. And has anybody ever sat with you and tried to talk to you about what it means?	
B: ……. No.	No one explained it to him and he didn't like to ask
R: Is it one of those things you don't want to	

ask? B: Mmm R: A bit like when you were here (at special school)… B: Ye. R: …Why am I here? Right. Have you got a computer or internet …(A shakes head)… right, in the library you could get internet couldn't you? And you could go and find out there if you wanted to. B: Ye. R: Ye. If you wanted to, some people wouldn't… B: Mmm. R: … want to. 'Cos you think well what's the use of knowing? But…… so tell me a bit more. What were the best times at T (special school)? B: Making lo… making lots of friends…. Making f… knowing the teachers more. .. …….. R: Mmm.	Best things at school were making lots of friends and knowing the teachers more…. Getting to know everyone.

B: Getting to know everyone. ……. …….	
R: What did you enjoy most at S (special school)?	
B: …….. errr. …….	
R: The very best bits.	
B: ……. ……. .. working with you.	Says best bits were working with R.
R: oh really (laughs)…	
B: Ye.	
R: …you're not just saying that?	
B: NO	Emphatic about this
R: (laughs) What did we d… what did you do with me?	
B: ……..	
R: …that you remember?	

B: ……..	
…… when… when we went on a…. when we went out on trips.	Especially going out on trips.
R: Oh right. What trips do you remember?	
B: ……. it's hard to… hard to remember now.	It's hard to remember where the trips were too now
R: ……. Did we go to CI?	
B: I remember going there errrm…	
R: Ye.	
B: …we went…	
R: Did we go to C village to walk round the village?	
B: Ye I w….	
R: …to the sewage farm. OK	
B: Oh ye I know.	
R: Ye. Where else? B.	

B: B, F,	
R: F ye…. So was that all in my… that wasn't all in my class though was it? A lot of it was I suppose.	
B: No.	
R: A lot of trips we did didn't we?.....	
Ye…… so those were the best… you liked the trips out best do you?	
	He liked the trips best
B: Ye.	
R: The visits that people do. But you did visits in other classes as well that you enjoyed I suppose did you as well….. ye?	
B: Ye. Like err……..	e.g. going to Paris
……. going to Paris. …..	
R: You liked that…	
B: …with Mrs C.	
R: Ye. …… So the best bit of school is when you're not there.	
	Best bits were all the visits.
B: Mmm.	
R: (laughs) OK doing visits. And can you tell me some bad times at T(special school)	

then… what were the worst bits?	
B: ……. Getting detentions.	Bad times were getting detentions
R: What for?	
B: Stupid b… errr stupid things.	For doing stupid things
R: Tell me one.	
A: …… errr well like that incident with H.(other pupil with profound ASD)	Like the incident of teasing another pupil teasing another pupil.
R: What was that? HD?	
B: Ye.	
R: Oh ye, what was that?	
B: ……. When we well…wasn't always me it was me an Q (other pupil) teasing him.	It wasn't always just Brian it was him and another pupil teasing him
R: Right.	
B: 'n I … I didn't know what was wrong with him at first.	Brian didn't know what was wrong with the other pupil at first
R: Right, so you sort of teased him because you didn't know that there was anything	

wrong with him.	
B: Mmm.	
R: Right. So you got into trouble about teasing…	
B: Ye.	
R: … other people. I suppose some people would call it bullying…	
	Agrees that this could be called bullying
B: Ye.	
R: … almost wouldn't they? Ye. But you don't …. wouldn't… would you do that now or…no..?	
B: No.	But agrees that he wouldn't do that now
R: No. So when you left here (special school) ye, you went to college…?	
B: Ye.	
R: Tell me a bit about college. What did you do there? And what was good and what was bad?	
B: …….	
……. Having more freedom, …… going like… 'cos we've got massive football pitch	Good bit about college was having more freedom

…… two and half acres, …….. going there on break times, playing footie with my mates, ……. ……..	Going on massive football pitch (two and a half acres) going on there at break times
R: Mmm.	playing footie on there at break times with his mates.
B: …. Going out 'n… well going to …… …and err theme parks as well with college.	Liked going on visits with college like to theme parks.
R: Visits again.	
B: Ye.	
R: Ye.	
B: …… errrm….. doing these err …… ….. was like a little… little courses we have to do every week. … Can choose fishin' … clay pigeon…clay pigeon shooting, horse riding…	Like doing short courses like fishing, clay pigeon shooting, horse riding,
R: Mmm lovely.	
B: … swimming…	swimming.
R: What courses were you actually doing, studying there, what was your big courses?	
B: Err … Land and Environment.	Studied land and environment at college.

R: Right… And is that the only course you did or did you do some others? How long were you at college?	
B: Err…… two year.	Was at college for two years
R: So what did you do in the other year? Was it a two year course?	
B: It was a two year course.	
R: Right. And did you enjoy that course?	
B: Ye.	Enjoyed the course
R: Good. So you did two years at college so then you were eighteen. Then what did you do?	
B: …… I errr…… I was… I was going to apply for this other course on err …… …. this horse course I had to have a certain level to get on to it.	
R: Mmm.	
B: I didn't mmmm have… I didn't quite make the grade.	At eighteen he didn't have the right grades to do the course on horses that he wanted to do.
R: Oh. That's disappointing. Was that going to be at errr S (agricultural college of further education)?	

B: No at college 'cos we got the…	
R: Oh at college.	
B: …they got a equine centre on the ……	
… college…	That course was going to be a the college where they have an equine centre
R: Have they, at U (local college of further education)?	
B: X (other agricultural college).	
R: Oh you were at X! You weren't at U.	
B: No.	
R: Oh at X, right. Oh I see. And you just didn't… quite make the grade for it.	
B: No. I had to… had to have a Entry Level 2 …	He had to have Entry Level 2 to do Horse Care
R: Right.	
B: … to make… well to go on to the course.	
R: Entry level 2 in what….. in….?	
B: Horse Care.	

R: Right and you didn't quite get up to it.	
B: No.	
R: That was… so you were very disappointed about that were you?	
B: Mmm.	Was very disappointed that he couldn't get on to the equine course.
R: And so what happened then?	
B: …… Err…….. I fin… I finished college. ….. I was at a… I w…. I must 'a been staying at home for about …	He finished at college
…….. probably about… couple of months.	had a couple of months at home.
R: Mmm.	
B: Then err… I had errr…… what's 'er name…. Errr XK (female name), …	
R: Mmm	A woman helped him before he left college to get a job somewhere
B: …… She w… w… before I left college she err helped me through well to get a job somewhere…	
R: What's her job, is she 'Connexions 'people or careers adv…?	

B: Errr… She works with Connexions.	She works with 'Connexions' (Career advice Service)
R: Right. Right. … So you knew her. And then she found you something did she?	
B: Ye.	
R: What did she find for you?	
B: She err got me a placement where I'm working now. O… Only done working there for about six months.	Then she got him a placement at the equine centre where he is now working
R: And that's an equine centre where you… what sorts of things do you do there?	
B: All sorts. Mucking out, grooming, leading the horses to and from the fields, helping people get on the horses, taking them into the indoor or going out for a hack, walking with them if it's like a five year old kid.	Does mucking out, grooming, leading horses to and from fields Taking them indoors Going out for a hack Walking with them if it's a five year old kid
R: Mmm. …….. Good. And how long you been there you say, six months?	
B: No. I was working there for six months part time…	Worked there for six months part time,
R: Right.	
B: …then …… I went on … to err DU(work scheme for people with learning difficulties) for about two weeks, then I …	then went to DU (work scheme for people with learning difficulties) where they look on

	computers for jobs.
R: Mmm, what's DU?	
B: Oh err… looking on computers finding jobs…	
R: Oh right yes.	
B: Then after well… when I finished there I asked my boss if he could take me on full time. And he said…… automatically he said ye.	He asked boss at equine centre if he would take him on full time
	He automatically said yes
R: Lovely… You were thrilled with that were you?	
B: yep. So I've been working there at least … year and a half.	
	Has been there for 18 months at least.
R: Well done. That's super, and you've… quite happy there?	
B: Ye.	
	He's happy there
R: Ye good. And what do you do in your spare time?	
B: …… Spare time I … I'm either playing on my Xbox360 or err going out with my mates. Having a good time.	
	In spare time plays on computer and goes out with his mates to have a good time.
R: What do you do when you're out, where d'you go?	

B: Err… ……. Go to the pub. Or err go to one of the clubs in C (city about 30 miles away).	Goes to pub and clubs.
R: Oh right. And where are your mates from? Are they local to you?	
B: They're local.	Mates are all local
R: Right. And where did you meet them?	
B: Err the first one I met was when I moved into my house.	The first mate he met when he moved into his house
R: Where y…. and you live with your Mum do you?	
B: Ye.	He lives with his Mum
R: And you met… so is it a neighbour or s…?	
B: Errr… next door but one to me.	His mate lives next door but one to him
R: Right. Good so is th… is that your best mate sort of thing?	
B: …… Ye.	He's his best mate
R: And then how d' you meet the others.	

B: …… Through him.	
R: Right.	He met his other mates through him
B: I met his cousin and then he introduced me to al… most… all of his mates.	He met his cousin and he introduced him to most all of his mates
R: Good. So you've got a nice group of friends there.	
B: Ye.	
R: Good. OK. And when they… when you go out with these group of friends down the pub, do they ever ask you where you went to school?	
B: No.(laughs)	(Laughs when I asked him his mates ask him where he went to school- embarrassment?)
R: They never ask you where you went to school?	They don't ask him where he went to school
B: No.	
R: You never comes up in conversation?	Where he went to school never comes up in conversation with his mates.
B: No.	
R: What if it did. If they said to you, 'Oh where did you…', if you were talking one day about where they'd been to school 'n that, I expect some of them went to school	

together perhaps, …	
B: Yer	
R: … and they said to you, 'Where d'you go to school?' What would you say?	
B: Well I'd say I'd been t…. well I used to go to a special school.	
	If asked he'd say he used to go to a sp sch.
R: You would, would you?	
B: Ye.	
R: Ye. 'Cos some people wouldn't. Some people are… are sort of ashamed of it…	
B: Mmm.	
R: …or think its something to be…. That they wouldn't like to talk about, or they try not to talk about it.	
B: It's like they're embarrassed.	R Suggests that people may feel embarrassed about admitting they went to special school.
R: Ye. You w… would you not be embarrassed about it?	
B: I would in a way.	Says he would feel embarrassed in a way.
R: You would.	

B: But he knew where I … he knew where I was coming from as well.	His friend knew 'where he was coming from'
R: Right. Your friend did?	
B: Ye.	
R: Ye. So… you've talked to him about it have you?..... and what did he say?	
B: On odd occasions. He says…… well says that's wh… well…. that's type of school you should be going to for who you are……	He's talked to him about it on odd occasions
R: Right. …… Have you ever had anybody that's sort of made fun of you or… sort of questioned it or was rude to you about going to special school?	His friend says…… well says that's the type of school you should be going to for who you are……
B: No.	
R: That's never happened?	
B: (shakes head)	Never had anyone make fun of him for going to special school.
R: So if you… but you've presumably told a few people…	
B: Ye.	
R: …about your school. When you were at	

college did people ask you where you went…… 'n that?	
B: … Ye but most of the people from college used to come here like QG (other ex-pupil).	He's told a few people about where he went to school
R: Right so they were people who'd been to special school anyway…	Most of the people he had been to college with had been to special school anyway.
B: Ye.	
R: … so it didn't happen so much there, they knew…	
B: No.	
R: … they knew you. So wh… a question I always ask is, say that you had a child that had the same sort of needs as you have, or … any learning difficulties or anything like that, and when they got to eleven they… perhaps gone…perhaps or five or eleven, and they th… th… the point came where they'd got to decide that they went to special school or mainstream school, what school would you choose for them/	
B: ……. Well if there was…..	
R: if they had any learning difficulty. If they found… you know…	
B: Ye.	
R: …reading difficult, like you said you found,	

what would you choose r them?	
B: …….. Errr put ‘em into a special school.	
R: Definitely would you?	
B: Ye.	Would definitely choose special school for his child if they had learning difficulties.
R: Why’s that? Why would you choose that?	
A: ‘Cos … it’s like ……it’s sort of like a nursery but for sort of older kids. ……	It’s like a nursery for older kids.
R: Right. I’ve never heard it described like that before. Ye. In what way is it like a nursery?	
B: ‘Cos… you get looked after, … you get helped like with your work, and y….. well it’s like …….	Because you get looked after,
… like if you pl…. if you go on the playground, you got people watching over you …….	helped with your work, people watch over you on the playground.
R: And how wou….. how’s that different from mainstream school?	
B: Mainstream… it’s sort of more calmed, calmed down ‘n mainstream…. You get to do sort of what you want … but not… in a way.	Special school is more calmed down than mainstream.
R: … Sorry… you get to do what you want in which school? mainstream or special?	

B: Mainstream.	
	You get to do what you want in mainstream.
R: Mainstream. Do you feel… think you didn't get to do what you want in special school?	
B: ……..	
R: What sorts of things are you thinking about that you could get to do what you want in mainstream?	
B: Errr like errr… you … you … you wouldn't not like ……. Well you're not allowed to go out of the premises.	Like going off the premises which you're not allowed to do in sp sch
R: Right. And you are…	
B: …or…	
R: … in mainstream.	
B: Mmm.	
R: Would you have liked to have been able to go out… off the premises?	
B … Ye like just to go… like pop down to the shop.	Would have liked to be able to pop down the shop in special school.
R: You would have liked that would you?	

B: Ye. R: Is there anything else here (at the special school) that you would have liked… wished was different? B: …….. errrr…….. ……. be a…… R: Sorry? AB Err be able to do what you… well …… .. what you want. R: When? B: Like … like err if…. like at college…. …….. R: Right. Well you can't exactly do what you want… B: No. R: … at college can you? I mean you… B: You could do…	

R: …still have to go to classes don't you?	
B: Ye.	
R: You'd get chucked out if you didn't go to classes. But when… when d'you mean do what you want?	
B: Like at breaks like…	Would have liked special school to be more like college in that you could do what you wanted e.g. during breaks.
R: Right and you found that you couldn't do what you wanted here (at special school) at break times?	
B: Mmm. It's a bit…. It's a bit restricted.	
R: Right. Mmm. … So have there been any bad things for you about having been to a special school?	Special school is a bit restricted.
B: ……	
R: Can you think of anything?	
B: No, not as I know of.	Can't think of any bad things about having been to special school.
R: And if you were sta… if you were eleven again… …and you'd been to M primary school and you were the one making the decision about which school to go to, …… which school would you choose for yourself now?	
B: …… I'd probably come here. (special	Would probably choose special school for

school) R: Would you? B: Why's that? A: …….. because it would be my decision to come 'cos I wanted to get like a… good err education. …….. R: Do you not think you could get a good education at I or at Q (both local mainstream secondary schools), or wherever? B: ……. ……. Probably not. R: Why not? B: …….. ……. R: You don't know…. B: Stuck for words again. R: Mm? You're stuck for words again. There is a word is there? But you just forgotten what it is. B: Mmm.	himself again. So that he could get a good education. Doesn't think he could have got a good education at either of the two local mainstream schools.

R: Try and think because it's quite important just for me… just to get the word as you mean about say … saying you… you feel you've got a good education at special school…	
B: Ye.	
R: … errr and then I said, 'Well would you get a good… wouldn't you get a good education if you went to one of the other secondary mainstream schools?'	
B: you'd probably get a same… more probably get a good education here (special school) than probably there.	
R: In what way? What would be better here than there?	Would probably get a better education at special school than in mainstream.
B: …… 'Cos errr there's more… things. ..	
R: More ……what sort of things?	
B: …… You have to do more things to get there … why education …. than…	
R: Than in mainstream?	You have to do more things to get there
B: Ye.	

R: Can you just give me an example. What sort of things you have to do here (special school) that you wouldn't have to do in mainstream? B: Like tests…….. R: Right……. B: Maths tests, English ……. R: Do you think you did more of those here (special school) than you would in a … B: Ye. R: …mainstream school. Do you? b: Mmm R: They do do exams though don't they when year eleven in mainstream schools, GCSEs and things like that. A: Ye. R: Do… d.. you felt you did a lot here (special school). …… Right. Well I don't know what else there is to say, we.. I.. I was saying that I was going to write this information up and hope that people who decide….	Thinks he would do more tests (English and maths) in special school

B: Ye. R: …about special schools and mainstream schools would… would read it. So what message would you like to send to those people who make those decisions about special schools? B: ……. …… that's a bit of a tough one. R: It is a tough one. Well d'you… do you think they should build more, stop building them, errr try and get everybody into the same sort of school, even if with a separate little unit in the school, or with everybody in all the same classes? B: I reckon they should build more schools. R: What sort of schools? B: More special schools… R: …you think… … B: 'cos… R: special schools….. B: Ye.	Thinks they should build more special schools. (Example of me interrupting inappropriately)

R: So if I gave you three words to describe… a special school, this special school obviously because it's the only one you know isn't it? What… what three words would you use to describe S. special school? B: …….. …… …… R: Have a go. I don't mind if you use more than three. How would you d… sum up … in summary what do you think S. (special) school's … think of S school? B: ……. … caring. R: Right. B: ……. (whispers ;caring' to himself)……. looked after. ……. and… ……. can't get that last one……. R: have a go. Go on try. B: …….. …… R: That's pretty good anyway, 'caring and looked after'. And you don't… what about if you'd gone to… which school would you	

have gone to if you'd errm… would it be I (name of local secondary mainstream school), you'd have gone to?	Describes special schools as caring, looked after
B: … Ye.	
R: So if you'd gone to I (local mainstream secondary school), do you think you'd have been able to use those same words, 'caring and looked after' when you'd lef there?	
B: No.	Doesn't think he could have used the same words to describe the mainstream school he might have gone to.
R: No? …… What would your life have been like if you'd gone to a big mainstream secondary school do you think?	
B: Probably not very good.	
R: In what way? Describe it to me a bit, what do you think would have… it would have been like?	
B: A poor education. …….	Thinks if he'd gone to mainstream school his life would not have been very good, thinks it would have been a poor education
……. I wouldn't be able to get my job……..	
……	He wouldn't have been able to get his job
R: Can you tell me a bit more about that? Why would it have been a poor education?	
B: …… not many ..	
…….. writing to do. …….	

…… ‘s like……. tests……	
R: Right. … Ye… Would it have been different in any other way apart from the lessons would there be… have been anything else that’s different if you’d gone to mainstream school?	
B: ……. …… errr….	
R: Some hard questions…	
A: Ye.	
R: … these ones. (laughs) The last ones are always the hardest.	
B:……	
R: Just imagine you’d gone to a big school … a big… big mainstream school, with I dunno… there’s about six hundred, seven hundred, eight hundred people there…	
B: Mmm.	
R: … how would your life have been different?	
B: Errr……. difficult ……	Thinks life would have been more difficult for him in a mainstream school

R: Ho… what would have been difficult?	
B: ……. Doing the work ‘d be… probably ‘s like a bit more harder.	The work would be a bit more harder.
R: Right. …… At the s… at the mainstream school the work…	
B: Ye.	
R: …could have been harder. Apart from the work would there have been anything different?	
B: …….. …….. ……..	
R: No?	
B: No.	
R: You think it would have been just the same…	
B: Mmm.	Otherwise it would have been the same as being at special school.
R: … as being here? So it was the work…	
B: Ye.	

R: …that would have been harder. Whereas at special school you think the work was …	
B: …….. …… Moderate, more easy to deal with.	The work at special school was moderate, more easy to deal with.
R: Easier for you…	
B: Ye.	
R:… to deal with.	
B: ye.	
R: Right OK. Is there anything else that you'd like to say that's important, I probably haven't asked all the questions. When I meet you again I'll probably think of some questions that I didn't ask you.	
B: ye.	
R: And… just tell me one more thing, what did your family think about your coming to special school?	
B: ……. They were happy for me 'cos they wanted me to get an… a good job out of it as well.	
R: Right. So… are they happy that you came	His family were happy for him to go to

here still?	special school as they thought he would get a good job out of it as well.
B: Ye.	They are still happy that he went to special school.
R: Good. … And you say to me that you've never had anybody… sort of make fun of you or …. errm sort of make you feel ashamed of coming to a special school or anything like that… or is that true?	
B: …….	
R: never had anybody speak badly of … the fact that you've been to special school?..... or treat you badly or bully you 'cos of it or anything like that?	
B: …….. not…. Not as I can remember.	
R: No, not…. Neither when you were here (special school) nor since then?..... And you quite happily tell somebody you've been here (special school) or would you rather …	Can't remember any one making fun of him or making him feel ashamed of coming to special school.
B: I…	
R: … steer the conversation away?	
B: if somebody asks me which school I went to I tell 'em. I tell which school I went to.	
R: Good. Good. … OK. Well thank you very much A that's great. … (indistinguishable)… switch this off	If somebody asks him which school he went to he tells them.
END	

Second stage: Brian

4. Units of general meaning	5. Unit of meaning relevant to research question
Went to junior school for about eight years before he went to special school- something like that	Attended mainstream primary school
Going to special school was bit scary … at first, just getting to know people and making new friends. knowing the teachers	
Other pupils from junior school were going t go to different secondary schools	
Parents decided he should go to special school.	Parents decision to send him to special school
His parents knew he had something wrong with him.	Something 'wrong' with him
Doctors said he has Asperge's syndrome.	Diagnosis- Aspergers but he knows very little about it
He knows a bit about it This means he can't properly talk on the phone he may stutter on the phone for example.	
They found out he had Aspergers after he went to special school but before he left there	
No one told him why he was going to special school	

He wondered why he went to the school. Realised when he was half way through college Thought the special school was a normal secondary school Didn't realise he was at a special school until he saw the other people with different difficulties to him… e.g. Down's syndrome. He didn't realise it was a special school straight away. Had been at special school for about 3 years before he realised it was a special school i.e. when he was about 14. Thinks special school is a place for people with learning difficulties, talking difficulties and people who can't write properly. It was a bit difficult to fit himself into that He thought it wasn't the right place for him. He was wandering why he was at the special school He didn't ask anybody Didn't feel he could ask why he was at the school because he might have sounded a bit	Didn't know why he went to special school Thought the sp sch was a 'normal' school When he saw people with different difficulties from him Down's syndrome he realised it was a special sch. Didn't realise straight away it was a sp sch. Not until he'd been there about three years Sp sch is a place for people with LD, talking difficulties, people who can't write properly It was a bit difficult to fit himself into that He thought it wasn't the right place for him. He was wandering why he was at the special school

stupid. This made him feel nervous It made life difficult in a way Describes himself as having learning difficulties 'in a sort of way' Couldn't read when he went to special school aged eleven, but he managed to start reading books e.g. at break times then started to get a bit more experience reading books Learnt new things like woodwork, art, maths, English. Reading was his only learning difficulty Didn't realise he had Asperger's until he went to college College gave him tests to diagnose his Asperger's. Didn't really make any difference to him when he found out he had Aspergers He was trying to understand it No one explained it to him and he didn't like to	He didn't ask anybody Didn't feel he could ask why he was at the school because he might have sounded a bit stupid. This made him feel nervous It made life difficult in a way Describes himself as having learning difficulties 'in a sort of way' Couldn't read when he went to special school aged eleven, but he managed to start reading books e.g. at break times then started to get a bit more experience reading books Reading was his only LD

ask Best things at school were making lots of friends and knowing the teachers more…. Getting to know everyone. Says best bits were working with R. Emphatic about this Especially going out on trips. It's hard to remember where the trips were too now He liked the trips best e.g. going to Paris Best bits were all the visits. Bad times were getting detentions For doing stupid things Like the incident of teasing another pupil teasing another pupil. It wasn't always just Barry it was him and another pupil teasing him	He was trying to understand Aspergers whe at college No one explained it to him and he didn't like to ask Best things at school were making lots of friends and knowing the teachers more…. Getting to know everyone. Says best bits were working with R. Emphatic about this Especially going out on trips. He liked trips best Bad bit- detention for bullying

Barry didn't know what was wrong with the other pupil at first Agrees that this could be called bullying But agrees that he wouldn't do that now Good bit about college was having more freedom Going on massive football pitch (two and a half acres) going on there at break times playing footie on there at break times with his mates. Liked going on visits with college like to theme parks. Like doing short courses like fishing, clay pigeon shooting, horse riding, swimming. Studied land and environment at college. Was at college for two years	More freedom at college

Enjoyed the course At eighteen he didn't have the right grades to do the course on horses that he wanted to do. That course was going to be a the college where they have an equine centre He had to have Entry Level 2 to do Horse Care Was very disappointed that he couldn't get on to the equine course. He finished at college had a couple of months at home. A woman helped him before he left college to get a job somewhere She works with 'Connexions' (Career advice Service) Then she got him a placement at the equine where he is now working Does mucking out, grooming, leading horses to and from fields Taking them indoors Going out for a hack Walking with them if it's a five year old kid	

Worked there for six months part time, then went to DU (work scheme for people with learning difficulties) where they look on computers for jobs. He asked boss at equine centre if he would take him on full time He automatically said yes Has been there for 18 months at least. He's happy there In spare time plays on computer and goes out with his mates to have a good time. Goes to pub and clubs. Mates are all local The first mate he met when he moved into his house He lives with his Mum His mate lives next door but one to him	

He's his best mate He met his other mates through him He met his cousin and he introduced him to most all of his mates (Laughs when I asked him his mates ask him where he went to school- embarrassment?) They don't ask him where he went to school Where he went to school never comes up in conversation with his mates. If asked he'd say he used to go to a sp sch. R Suggests that people may feel embarrassed about admitting they went to special school. Says he would feel embarrassed in a way. His friend knew 'where he was coming from' He's talked to him about it on odd occasions His friend says…… well says that's the type of school you should be going to for who you are……	(Laughs when I asked him his mates ask him where he went to school- embarrassment?) If asked he'd say he used to go to a sp sch.

Never had anyone make fun of him for going to special school.	R Suggests that people may feel embarrassed about admitting they went to special school.
	Says he would feel embarrassed in a way.
He's told a few people about where he went to school	His friend knew 'where he was coming from'
	He's talked to him about it on odd ocassions
Most of the people he had been to college with had been to special school anyway.	
	His friend says…… well says that's the type of school you should be going to for who you are……
Would definitely choose special school for his child if they had learning difficulties.	
It's like a nursery for older kids.	Never had anyone make fun of him for going to special school.
Because you get looked after, helped with your work, people watch over you on the playground.	He's told a few people about where he went to school
Special school is more calmed down than mainstream.	Most of the people he had been to college with had been to special school anyway.
You get to do what you want in mainstream.	Would definitely choose special school for his child if they had learning difficulties.

	It's like a nursery for older kids.
Like going off the premises which you're not allowed to do in sp sch	
	Because you get looked after,
	helped with your work,
	people watch over you on the playground.
Would have liked to be able to pop down the shop in special school.	
Would have liked special school to be more like college in that you could do what you wanted e.g. during breaks.	Special school is more calmed down than mainstream.
Special school is a bit restricted.	You get to do what you want in mainstream.
Can't think of any bad things about having been to special school.	
	Like going off the premises which you're not allowed to do in sp sch
Would probably choose special school for himself again.	
	Would have liked to be able to pop down the shop in special school.
So that he could get a good education.	
	Would have liked special school to be more like college in that you could do what you wanted e.g. during breaks.
Doesn't think he could have got a good education at either of the two local mainstream schools.	
	Special school is a bit restricted.
	Can't think of any bad things about having been to special school.
Would probably get a better education at special school than in mainstream.	
	Would probably choose special school for

You have to do more things to get	himself again.
Thinks they should build more special schools.	So that he could get a good education.
(Example of me interrupting inappropriately)	Doesn't think he could have got a good education at either of the two local mainstream schools.
Describes special schools as caring, looked after	
Doesn't think he could have used the same words to describe the mainstream school he might have gone to.	Would probably get a better education at special school than in mainstream.
	You have to do more things to get
Thinks if he'd gone to mainstream school his life would not have been very good, thinks it would have been a poor education	Thinks they should build more special schools.
He wouldn't have been able to get his job	(Example of me interrupting inappropriately)
Thinks life would have been more difficult for him in a mainstream school	Describes special schools as caring, looked after
The work would be a bit more harder.	Doesn't think he could have used the same words to describe the mainstream school he might have gone to.
Otherwise it would have been the same as being at special school.	Thinks if he'd gone to mainstream school his life

	would not have been very good, thinks it would have been a poor education
The work at special school was moderate, more easy to deal with.	
	He wouldn't have been able to get his job
His family were happy for him to go to special school as they thought he would get a good job out of it as well.	
	Thinks life would have been more difficult for him in a mainstream school
They are still happy that he went to special school.	
	The work would be a bit more harder.
Can't remember any one making fun of him or making him feel ashamed of coming to special school.	
	Otherwise it would have been the same as being at special school.
If somebody asks him which school he went to he tells them.	
	The work at special school was moderate, more easy to deal with.
	His family were happy for him to go to special school as they thought he would get a good job out of it as well.
	They are still happy that he went to special school.
	Can't remember any one making fun of him or making him feel ashamed of coming to special school.
	If somebody asks him which school he went to he tells them.

Third stage: Brian

5. Unit of meaning relevant to research question	6. Clustering units of relevant meaning
Attended mainstream primary school	Mainstream attended
Parents decision to send him to special school	Parents choice
Something 'wrong' with him	
Diagnosis- Aspergers but he knows very little about it	Lack of knowledge of his situation
Didn't know why he went to special school	..
Thought the sp sch was a 'normal' school	..
When he saw people with different difficulties from him Down's syndrome he realised it was a special sch.	..
Didn't realise straight away it was a sp sch.	
Not until he'd been there about three years	..
Sp sch is a place for people with LD, talking difficulties, people who can't write properly	..
	LDs
It was a bit difficult to fit himself into that	
He thought it wasn't the right place for him.	He didn't identify as having learning difficulties

He was wandering why he was at the special school	Not the right place for him
He didn't ask anybody	Lack of knowledge of his situation
Didn't feel he could ask why he was at the school because he might have sounded a bit stupid.	..
This made him feel nervous	..
It made life difficult in a way	Made life difficult for him
Describes himself as having learning difficulties 'in a sort of way'	
Couldn't read when he went to special school aged eleven,	Identifying/not identifying with having LDs
but he managed to start reading books	
e.g. at break times	
then started to get a bit more experience reading books	
Reading was his only LD	
He was trying to understand Aspergers when at college	Learning at sp sch
No one explained it to him and he didn't like to ask	Minimising his LD
Best things at school were making lots of friends and knowing the teachers more…. Getting to	

know everyone. Says best bits were working with R. Emphatic about this Especially going out on trips. He liked trips best Bad bit- detention for bullying More freedom at college (Laughs when I asked him his mates ask him where he went to school- embarrassment?) If asked he'd say he used to go to a sp sch. R Suggests that people may feel embarrassed about admitting they went to special school. Says he would feel embarrassed in a way. His friend knew 'where he was coming from' He's talked to him about it on odd occasions His friend says…… well says that's the type of school you should be going to for who you are……	Lack of knowledge of his condition Friends at sp sch Getting to know teachers at sp sch Visits Detention for his bullying another pupil Contrasting freedom of college Embarrassment at admitting he attended sp sch.

Never had anyone make fun of him for going to special school.	
He's told a few people about where he went to school	Friends OK with it
Most of the people he had been to college with had been to special school anyway.	NO one ever made fun of him for attending sp sch
Would definitely choose special school for his child if they had learning difficulties.	Would choose sp sch for his similar child
It's like a nursery for older kids.	Sp sch is like 'a nursery for older kids'
Because you get looked after, helped with your work, people watch over you on the playground.	Looked after Helped with work People watch over you on the playground
Special school is more calmed down than mainstream.	More calm than mainstream
You get to do what you want in mainstream.	
Like going off the premises which you're not allowed to do in sp sch	More freedom in mainstream
Would have liked to be able to pop down the shop in special school.	Would have liked more freedom
Would have liked special school to be more like college in that you could do what you wanted	

e.g. during breaks. Special school is a bit restricted. Can't think of any bad things about having been to special school. Would probably choose special school for himself again. So that he could get a good education. Doesn't think he could have got a good education at either of the two local mainstream schools. Would probably get a better education at special school than in mainstream. You have to do more things to get Thinks they should build more special schools. (Example of me interrupting inappropriately) Describes special schools as caring, looked after Doesn't think he could have used the same words to describe the mainstream school he might have gone to. Thinks if he'd gone to mainstream school his life would not have been very good, thinks it would have been a poor education	More freedom Sp sch as restricted No bad things about sp sch Would choose sp sch for himself again Sp sch as a good education Wouldn't have got a good education at either of the two mainstream schs available Should build more sp schs Sp sch as caring Sp sch as looked after

He wouldn't have been able to get his job	
Thinks life would have been more difficult for him in a mainstream school	If he'd not gone to sp sch his life would not have been so good
The work would be a bit more harder.	Assoc sp sch with getting his job
Otherwise it would have been the same as being at special school.	Life would be more difficult for him in mainstream sc.
The work at special school was moderate, more easy to deal with.	Harder work in mainstream
His family were happy for him to go to special school as they thought he would get a good job out of it as well.	Otherwise little difference between two types of school
	Support from family for his sp sch place
They are still happy that he went to special school.	
	Never bullied for attending sp sch
Can't remember any one making fun of him or making him feel ashamed of coming to special school.	Admits he went to sp sch when asked
If somebody asks him which school he went to he tells them.	

Fourth stage – Brian

6. Clusters of meaning	Central themes
Mainstream attended	Experience of mainstream
Parents choice	
Lack of knowledge of his situation .. .. LDs	Lack of agency/Locus of control
He didn't identify as having learning difficulties	Not identifying with people with LD
Not the right place for him	
Lack of knowledge of his situation	Agency/Locus of control
Made life difficult for him	
Identifying/not identifying with having LDs	
Learning at sp sch	Learning in sp sch
Minimising his LD Lack of knowledge of his condition	Locus of control/Agency
Friends at sp sch Getting to know teachers at sp sch	
Visits	Visits
Detention for his bullying another pupil	Bullying
Contrasting freedom of college	Contrasting freedom of college
Embarrassment at admitting he attended sp sch.	Stigma?
Friends OK with it	
No one ever made fun of him for attending sp sch	
Would choose sp sch for his similar child Sp sch is like 'a nursery for older kids'	Nurturing nature of sp sch

Looked after Helped with work People watch over you on the playground	
More calm than mainstream More freedom in mainstream	Lack of freedom in sp sch.
Would have liked more freedom	
More freedom	
Sp sch as restricted No bad things about sp sch	NO bad things in sp sch
Would choose sp sch for himself again	
Sp sch as a good education	
Wouldn't have got a good education at either of the two mainstream schs available	
Should build more sp schs	
Sp sch as caring Sp sch as looked after	Nurturing nature of sp sch
If he'd not gone to sp sch his life would not have been so good	Good effect on rest of life Assoc sp sch with getting job
Assoc sp sch with getting his job	
Life would be more difficult for him in mainstream sc.	Difficulties with mainstream
Harder work in mainstream	
Otherwise little difference between two types of school	
Support from family for his sp sch place	Support from family for sp sch. placement
Never bullied for attending sp sch Admits he went to sp sch when asked	Stigma?

APPENDIX 25

Comparison of author's and independent reader's codings- Darren

Darren Clustering units of relevant meaning

5. Unit of meaning relevant to research question	6. Clustering units of relevant meaning
Loved woodwork	**Practical curriculum**
	Loved woodwork
Still got some things he made in woodwork	Still got some things he made in woodwork
	A fold up table
A fold up table	He's still got all the things he made
He's still got all the things he made	He can remember quite a few things
	Like cooking
He can remember quite a few things	They used to cook their own dinners
	Only remembers the wood work class
Like cooking	Remembers the art teacher
	He remembers doing science
They used to cook their own dinners	He can't remember anything about the science lessons though
Used to go out on trips	He remembers a bit about PE
	PE was alright
Only remembers the wood work class	He remembers playing football in PE
	His best memory was of the drama.
Remembers the art teacher	He liked the drama
	He used to like the school Christmas plays
Experience of mainstream	Because mainly he had the main part
	He jokes that he enjoyed that because he got out of lessons
Assessment found he had a LD And that was why he was sent to special school	He agrees that wasn't the only reason though
	The Christmas plays were his favourite bit
	Only bad thing he remembers is when he was ill
He agrees that somebody told him he was going to special sch. but he can't remember what they said	He explains that he was at home ill and couldn't be in

	one of the Christmas plays- that was a bad thing
He didn't play with any kids on the street at that stage	He didn't like not coming in to school when he was ill
He can't remember anything about starting at the special school	**Visits**
He says he was very young	Used to go out on trips
He remembers doing science	**Experience of mainstream**
He can't remember anything about the science lessons though	yr1 primary only
He remembers a bit about PE	**LD**
	Assessment found he had a LD And that was why he was sent to special school
PE was alright	
He remembers playing football in PE	**Locus of control/Agency**
His best memory was of the drama.	He agrees that somebody told him he was going to special sch. but he can't remember what they said
He liked the drama	
	Inclusion
He used to like the school Christmas plays	He didn't play with any kids on the street at that stage
Because mainly he had the main part	
He jokes that he enjoyed that because he got out of lessons	**Loved/affection for sp sch**
	He didn't like not coming in to school when he was ill
He agrees that wasn't the only reason though	
The Christmas plays were his favourite bit	**Friendships**

Only bad thing he remembers is when he was ill He explains that he was at home ill and couldn't be in one of the Christmas plays- that was a bad thing He didn't like not coming in to school when he was ill He names a friend from school There were a few other friends but he's lost contact over the years His current mate went to the local comprehensive school His mate knows where he went to school His mate made no comment about it Darren told him he went to special school He's always told people if they've asked He told his mates he went there because he had learning disabilities They just accept it He's never ashamed to tell people He just blatantly tells them and he tells them why	He names a friend from school There were a few other friends but he's lost contact over the years **Stigma/ashamed of admitting attending sp sch** His current mate went to the local comprehensive school His mate knows where he went to school His mate made no comment about it Darren told him he went to special school He's always told people if they've asked He told his mates he went there because he had learning disabilities They just accept it He's never ashamed to tell people He just blatantly tells them and he tells them why He's never had any problem with that He doesn't know whether his brother and sister who also came to the school had any problem with that They've never said anything Emphatic that going to special school is nothing that he's ever been ashamed of **Teachers in sp sch** Would choose special school for his own child in the same position Because they can get more help The teachers in special school tend to help you more He thinks teachers in special school can spend more

He's never had any problem with that He doesn't know whether his brother and sister who also came to the school had any problem with that They've never said anything Emphatic that going to special school is nothing that he's ever been ashamed of Would choose special school for his own child in the same position Because they can get more help The teachers in special school tend to help you more He thinks teachers in special school can spend more time with you He thinks they can spend more time with you because they over crowd the other schools The classes are bigger in mainstream schools In special school the pupils have other (similar) kids around them- they are not left on their own In mainstream you feel left out in special school like the kids- you can understand them more and they can understand you more. If he'd gone to mainstream school he thinks he would have felt like he didn't want to learn anything	time with you Because there's more teachers in sp sch that can understand you **Difficulties with mainstream schools** He thinks they can spend more time with you because they over crowd the other schools The classes are bigger in mainstream schools In special school the pupils have other (similar) kids around them- they are not left on their own In mainstream you feel left out in special school like the kids- you can understand them more and they can understand you more. If he'd gone to mainstream school he thinks he would have felt like he didn't want to learn anything You would feel like you're pushed away from the group The pupils in the mainstream class are more capable of doing stuff Then you feel like you're pushed out of the group He thinks if everybody had to go to the same school the hardest thing would be getting on with the other kids **Belonging** In mainstream you feel left out You would feel like you're pushed away from the group The pupils in the mainstream class are more capable of doing stuff Then you feel like you're pushed out of the group

You would feel like you're pushed away from the group The pupils in the mainstream class are more capable of doing stuff Then you feel like you're pushed out of the group He's emphatic that whilst at sp sch. and since he has never wished he went to mainstream school Sometimes he found the work in sp. sch. a bit easy But sometimes it was a bit hard He can't think of anything bad about having gone to sp. sch. He can't think of anything he would change about his education He thinks that people would find it hard if they closed all the special schools He thinks if everybody had to go to the same school the hardest thing would be getting on with the other kids Would probably choose the special sch. For his own child with LDs Because there's more teachers in sp sch that can understand you	**No bad bits** He can't think of anything bad about having gone to sp. sch. He can't think of anything he would change about his education **Inclusion** He thinks if everybody had to go to the same school the hardest thing would be getting on with the other kids

APPENDIX 26

Sorted items clustered into themes

Collected Sorting

Special	Mainstream
Getting appropriate help-20	**The school for me -6**
Help from teachers	The right place for me
More help	The school that I'd like to go to
Helpful teachers	The school that I'd send my child to
More help from teachers	Where my family would like me to go to school
Teachers able to spend more time with you	The school that I would have liked to go to
Getting help	The school people should go to
Helpers	
Helpful teachers	**Normal-5**
Being helped	Feeling 100% normal
More help	Normal school
Spending time with me to help me	Normal
Being supported	Normal people
More help	The real world
More attention	
Support systems	**Cleverer pupils-4**
One to one support	Smarter
Getting what you need	Brainy people
Giving you time to do your work	Not needing help
Teachers having time to sit with you	Better at reading and writing
Work suitable for you	
Caring-15	
Being looked after	**Bullying-19**

Being looked after Being safe Pretty safe environment Family Caring Being treated like a big family Being kind Kind teachers Nice teachers Nice staff Nice pupils Good team work Relaxing Comfortable **Being different-14** Feeling a bit different Exam grades being different in special school from mainstream school Feeling a bit weird Struggling Being watched over Being left out Being a bit odd Un normal people Disabilities Keeping your head down Slower people Mental disability	Bullying Getting bullied Being nasty Getting beaten up Being picked on Bullying Name calling Bullying Being laughed at Putting you down Pupils being unkind Taking the mickey Pupils being nasty Being put down Name calling Bossy pupils Narrow minded people Being naughty Poor behaviour **Alienation -10** Feeling pushed away from the group Feeling left out Feeling invisible Feeling like an alien Being out of the pack Having mates on the estate where you live Knowing other kids in the neighbourhood

Physical disability- in a wheelchair	Going to a school close to home
People in wheelchairs	More friends
	Socialising
Acceptance-13	**Unhappiness-10**
Being accepted	Not coping with the work
Being with people like you	Getting behind
Not feeling left out	Not being able to concentrate
Mixing with your own sort	Noise
Same boat as you	Me getting annoyed
Other kids understanding you	Depression
More friends	Nervous
Friends	Feeling unstable
Having friends	Feeling unhappy
Getting on with people	People getting bored with you
Friends	
More friends	**Difficult work-10**
Friendly	Harder subjects
	Heavy duty work
Learning-9	More learning
Learning	Doing lots of different lessons
Improving learning	Hard
Being able to read and write	Harder ways of doing work
Being able to speak properly	Harder work
Being able to read and spell	Being hurried with your work
Making progress	Harder work
Doing better	Harder work
You keeping up with the work	

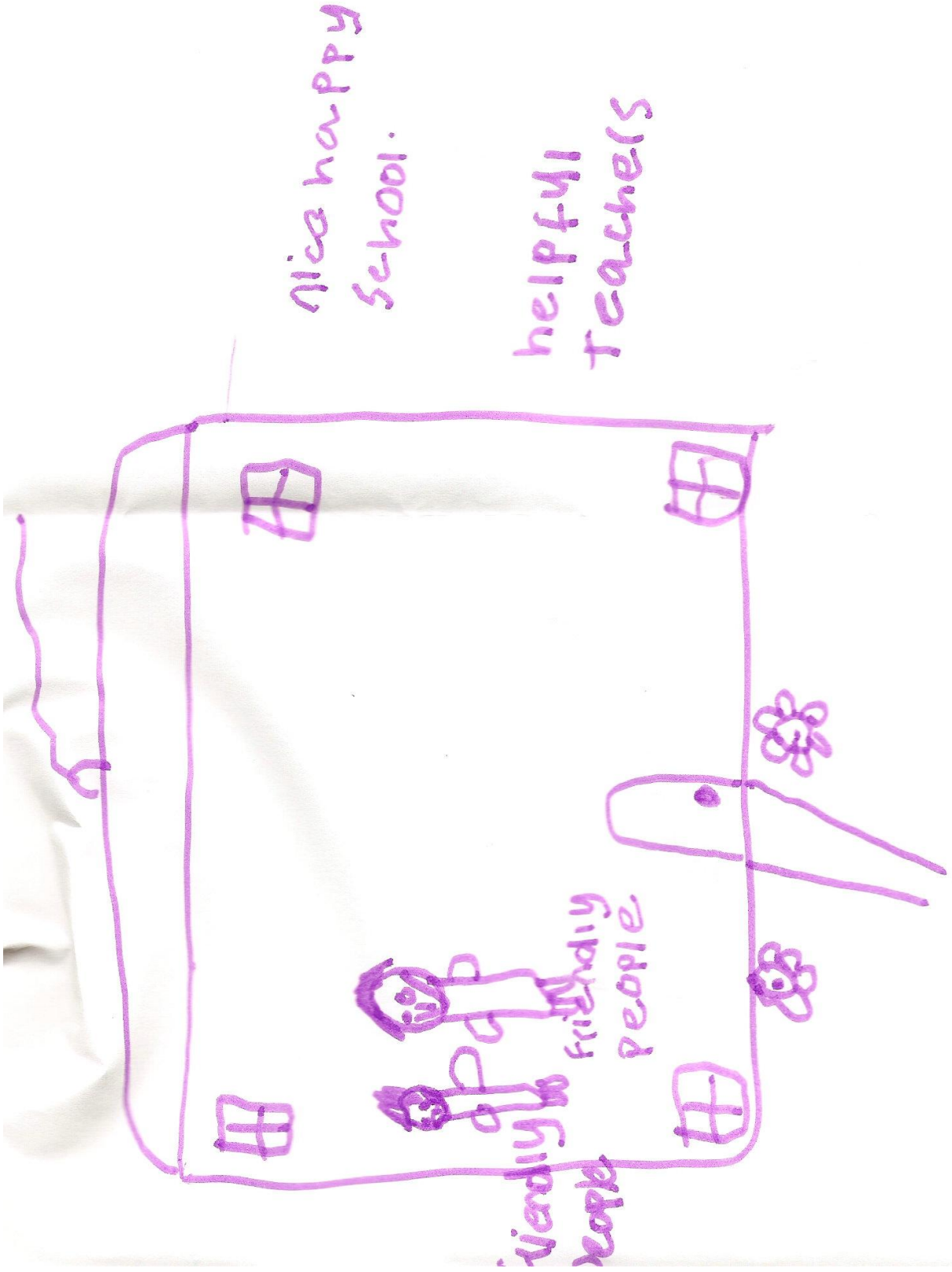
Learning **Happiness-7** Happy Being happy Feeling happy Having fun Feeling better Having a laugh Having fun **Confidence -7** More confidence Being confident More confident Independence Having confidence More grown up Doing work yourself **The best school for me-5** The school I'd choose for my own child with learning difficulties The school I would like to go to The school for me Better for me The school that I'd send my child to if they had **Relationships with teachers-3**	**Scale-3** Big classes Loads of people More children in the classes **Misc.** More freedom Freedom Strict teachers Strict Getting qualifications you need to get a job Better job Involvement with sports and sports competitions Doing tests and exams Your own helper Slow learning (I was slow at learning in mainstream)

Bond between teachers and pupils Knowing teachers more Getting on with teachers **Knowledgeable teachers-3** Teachers who know a bit more Teachers that understand pupils with learning difficulties learning difficulties **Scale-3** Bigger classrooms Bigger rooms Bigger classes- more pupils **Misc.** Full time Being proud of the school you went to Interesting things to do Changed your life Proper lessons A job at the end of it ('I did have a job but I went to college instead) More play stuff Nice facilities Things to play with on the playground Holidays with school Going on trips Good school	

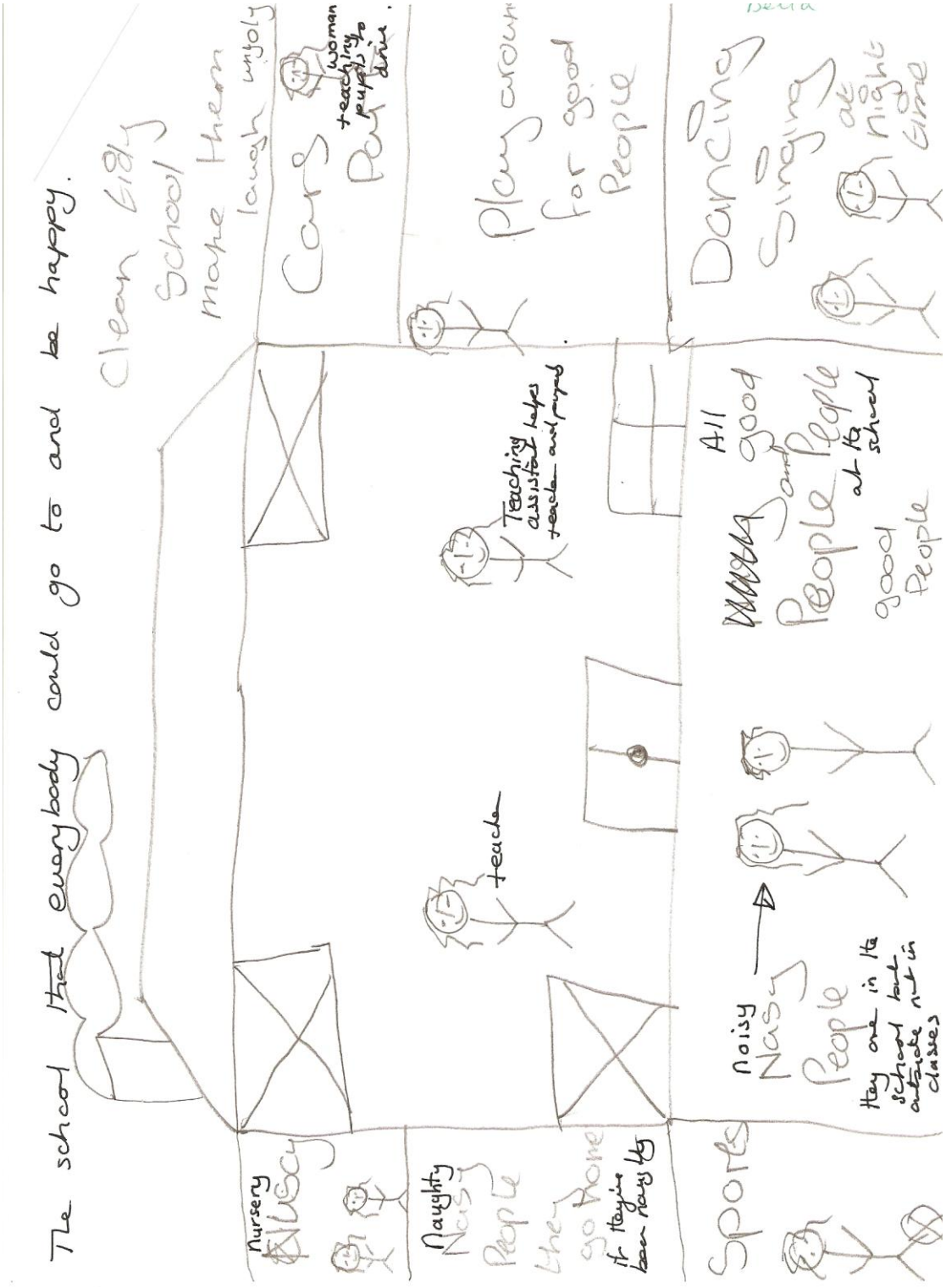
APPENDIX 27

Drawings of Amy, Bella and Diane possibly indicating their relative immaturity

Amy



Bella


The school that everybody could go to and be happy.
Clean City
School
Make them laugh enjoy
Cars
woman teaching pupils
Park
Nursery
Alisca
Naughty Nasty People Like go home if playing bad Nasty
teache
Teaching assistant helps teache and pupils
Plays crown for good People
Sports
Noisy Nasty People
They are in the school but outside not in classes
All good People and People at the school good People
Dancing
Singing
at night time

Diane

APPENDIX 28

Excerpt from Sullivan (1999): Unpublished Masers degree dissertation findings re self-esteem of pupils in the special school that the ex-pupils attended

Chapter 4

Results

Measures of self-esteem

The average self-esteem score for the whole sample was 13.42 out of a possible maximum of 24. This compares with a score in the normal population of 19.8 with primary school pupils and 18.00 with secondary school pupils (Lawrence 1981). The median score was 14. The average self-esteem score for boys was 14.63 and for girls 10.60. Eleven pupils scored 18 or more, ten of them were boys and one girl. They were evenly distributed between the years. Of the seven pupils scoring 20 or more none were girls. With an even distribution of boys and girls one would have expected to find three girls scoring 18 or more and three scoring less than 10

APPENDIX 29

Excerpt from Simon's transcript to show his ambivalence re which school he would like to attend

R: ....if you were starting again and you were five, but you'd got the brain that you've got now, the grown up brain that you've got, where would you take yourself to school?..... Where would you decide to go to school for you?

S: I would take my errrr…. primary school.

R: You'd go to primary school?

S: Ye.

R: You wouldn't go to special school? Why's that?

S: ….. Errr…. more errr……..I would have a choice of primary school or special school.

R: You'd have a choice… you're not… do you mean you're not sure which you'd choose.

S: No.

R: Ye. Why might you choose the primary school?

S: Errr…….. 'cos I might have a choice (indistinguishable) because of the type of work that they do there.

R: Which is … how's that different? So you might decide to go to primary school because of the sort of work they do there? Is that what you're saying?

S: Ye.

R: So how's that different from the sort of work you do in special school?

S: ……Not qu…… errrr any difference…….

R: But you said you might choose primary…

S: Ye.

R: … because of the sort of work they do. So you must think there's … it's different that work….

S: Errr the….

R: …. from special?

S: … primary school work is more… more harder.

R: Is it? Right. And what about when you got to eleven? And you had a choice between special school and mainstream secondary school as we now call it…

S: Ye.

R: … what would you choose then for yourself?

S: Eeeee…. Secondary stream.

R: The mainstream secondary school would you?...

S: Ye.

R: … the big school. So you would have probably gone to Q (local mainstream comprehensive school) would you? And would you have liked it at Q?

S: 'Cos that's what I had a choice of when I left DX (primary school attended)

R: When you left DX…

S: Ye.

R: …you could either go to Q or come here.

S: Ye.

R: But… but in those days … I suppose you didn't choose… I suppose the other people chose for you did they, your parents and that chose for you to come here? …… At the time perhaps you didn't kn… understand the difference or did you?..... So it's only looking back…

S: Ye

R:… that you decided you wished you'd gone to mainstream school. Could you say that? 'I wish I'd gone to mainstream school?' Is that true?

S: Ye.

R: Ye.

R: So even though you thought special school changed your life , you still wished you'd be able to go to special school… errrr sorry mainstream school. That's right is it? How would that have made your life different if you'd gone to mainstream school?

S: Well I …….would have done more errrr giv…err more education. ……

……..

R: 'More education', what sorts of things?

S: Like …….. doing more kind of harder work, 'cos like if I didn't leave a little bit too early.

R: Sorry, say that again. You…

S: Err… left a little bit too early.

R: Right. You would have liked to carry on even though you were sixteen?

S: Ye.

R: You felt it was a bit soon to leave and you'd 've liked to have gone to do harder work you mean

S: Ye.

R: So if you could 've gone to college and done the same lessons that you did here, would you have preferred that?..... Done more history, geography…what did you do? … RE, maths, …

S: Ye.

R: … science, those sorts of things?..... You'd like to have carried on with the same subjects, stayed on perhaps 'til you were how old?

S: Errm 'til I was eighteen……..

R: Eighteen. Would you have liked to have done that here? (Ry nods)…right.

S: Ye.

R: So you think if your life had been different you would have chosen to go to a ordinary mainstream school, how… would you have been able to cope with the work?

S: …… errr… would have errr coped with it errr a bit OK.

R: A bit OK. So if you'd had a bit of support there …

S: Ye.

R: …you think you'd have probably coped with it. So what you're saying to me is you wish you had gone to mainstream …

S: Ye.

R: … school. Even though you're saying S (special school) school w. was.. did you like being at S school, did you say that to me?

S: Ye.

R: And you felt it changed your life, you still wished you'd gone to mainstream school

S: Ye.

R: Ye like stayed there a little bit longer and then …

R: When you say, 'stayed there' you mean primary?

S: Ye. But you usually leave primary at eleven don't you?

S: Ye,

R: And then go to secondary. So would you have liked to have done that, stayed more in mainstream a little bit longer, and then perhaps if you couldn't have coped with the work, come to special school later?

S: Ye.

R: Right. Right. What do your family think about that?

S: They err thought that would have err been a …… I wouldn't of err coped with the work if I did that.

R: Do you think you would have done?

S: Ye.

R: Ye. … Did you think that at the time?

S: ……..

R: … when you were ten or eleven, did you think, 'I wish I could go to mainstream school'?

S: Ye.

R: Right. So you didn't really want to come here.

S: When I was ten, no.

R: No you didn't? …… But now you're saying you'd l……. in some ways it was very good that you came here.

S: Ye.

R: Right. So if you could have your time over again … what would you do? You'd …

S: ……..I would errr…go to mainstream school then come here (to special school).

R: Come here when?

S: Errr when I was errr left mainstream school.

R: At what age?

S: At thirteen.

R: About thirteen.

S: Ye.

R: You wanted more time in mainstream school is what you're saying to me.

S: Ye.

R: Right. Just to give you more of a chance you mean?

S: Ye.

R: What time… Err how old were you when you had your operation?

S: Errr I was… ten.

R: Right you were…. ye… so it was just after you'd come here wasn't it?

S: Ye.

R: Right. And do you think that made a big difference to you?

S: Ye.

R: Do you think after you'd had your operation you could have coped in mainstream?

S: Ye.

R: Did you think then, 'I wish I could go back to mainstream'?

S: (Nods)

R: You did? Did you say that to anybody?

S: No.

R: Why didn't you say to anybody?

S: …… I didn't think at the time.

R: You didn't think it at the time. No….

S: No.

APPENDIX 30

What's it like to go to special school?

The perspectives of ex-pupils of a special school on their education

by

Heather Thomas

An Executive Summary of work submitted to Birmingham University for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Executive Summary

Despite legislation, precedent and changing views of childhood and disability, the views of young people, especially those labelled as having learning difficulties are still not often heard. This work demonstrates that, if appropriate methods are used, then the views of such people can be accessed effectively. It also demonstrates the value of their contribution and what can happen if their contribution is ignored. Education officers and teachers will make better informed decisions if they listen to and act upon what the respondents in this work have to say.

Using a variety of methods the author elicited the perspectives on their education of twenty ex-pupils of a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The respondents were mostly in their early twenties. There was unanimous affection for the special school. They all felt they had progressed with their learning whilst there, as opposed to when they were in mainstream schools. Their responses mostly conformed to one of three positions.

Either:

- they felt they did not belong in the special school and felt they had had no part in the decision for them to be there. They did not like admitting to their peers that they had attended special school. They would have liked to attend mainstream school even though some of them had been bullied when they were there, but they felt they had never been consulted and they didn't like to say.

The danger for this group is that there is evidence that people categorised against their wishes are likely to express anger and suffer from lowered self-esteem (Branscombe et al 1999 p.40) This is ironic when we consider that one of this group thought he went to special school because he had a behaviour problem, he used to get angry easily at home, and also ironic in view of the probable already low self-esteem of these pupils (Sullivan (1999) unpublished Masters dissertation findings on the self-esteem of pupils in the special school that these participants attended).

Or:

- they identified strongly with the special school. They had tried mainstream education and not enjoyed it. They spoke of their love for the special school; it was like a second family for them. They seemed to derive their self-esteem by positioning themselves at the top of a hierarchy of special needs and denigrating mainstream schools and their pupils. They were proud that they had attended the special school.

Or:

- they had no desire to attend mainstream school. They had tried it and mostly had fairly traumatic experiences there. This group tended to be the least intellectually able of the sample, but not exclusively so. They felt safe and secure in the special school. They liked its structure and optimal size.

Implications of findings for policy and practice

Accessing the pupil's perspective

An understanding of the pupil's perspective on their own school placement is essential if we do not want to run the risk of jeopardising their education and psychological well-being. Those in authority need to know to what extent the pupil identifies with the group in which they are placed. They need to know what the motivations for the pupil are, whether they feel physically or emotionally threatened or whether they perceive that their placement is unjust. The perspective of the pupil is unique, vital and paramount in contributing to this decision.

Thomas and Loxley argue that an inclusive society...

> '... demands an active response in education. Such a response, while patchy, clearly already exists in schools... ... further moves in this direction depend on an active espousal of certain ideas by educators, to do not only with financing and redistribution, but also to do with **recognition, respect and listening to the voices of those who have been through special education.'**
> (Thomas and Loxley 2007 p.130 emphasis added)

I hope that this work is recognised as a 'move in this direction'. Not only does it listen to 'those who have been through special education' but it highlights what happens when we do not listen to those who are experiencing special education.

An appropriate environment for learning

Some ex-pupils felt that whereas they had not learnt in mainstream school, they had made academic progress in special school. It was not therefore that these pupils could not learn, rather the environment had not been conducive to learning in the mainstream school. The findings indicated several aspects of the learning environment which needed addressing.

First, there was too little accessible help in the classroom. This was the overwhelming message from the ex-pupils: it was the defining difference between mainstream and special schools. Staff in mainstream did not seem to have enough time to dedicate totally to pupils. Ex-pupils often described them as distracted; they seemed to be pre-occupied with business other than direct involvement with pupils. The ex-pupils spoke of being told to 'get on with it' on their own, of not being given the time to finish work on their own, or being told they could 'finish it off later'. Classes were large and pupils were left waiting for support which sometimes never came, or when it did, it was of inadequate quality. Second, they felt that work was inappropriate, too difficult, and there was too much pressure from expectations of work to be completed and deadlines to be met, whereas they appeared to be stimulated by practical activities, educational visits and residential experiences. Thirdly, some ex-pupils suggested that methods used in the special school made learning more accessible for them. Addressing each of these three aspects of the learning environment may enhance inclusion in mainstream schools.

Fourthly, the ex-pupils talked about other aspects of the special schools which collectively would seem to contribute to reducing stress in the learning environment. These include:

staff who have time to listen and care, time to have fun, and an optimally sized community where buildings and spaces within were of appropriate scale.

If we are to continue with separate provision in special schools this work also makes some recommendations for making them more inclusive.

The ex-pupils had very little experience of secondary mainstream schools, either first-hand or even second-hand in some cases. This ignorance may contribute to fear of the unknown and ultimately prejudice; I believe there is some evidence of this in the responses. It may be that this prejudice can be reduced by increasing familiarity between the two school populations, via steps such as co-location of mainstream and special schools, shared placements and joint activities.

Examinations should be similar to those taken in mainstream schools so that there is a common understanding between pupils from both types of provision. This may mean either school adapting, but there are exams which can accommodate a large range of ability.

Special schools may need to become less restrictive environments. Calculated risk assessments need to be made, but they must maximise opportunities for freedom and independent behaviour.

Of necessity this summary gives only a brief insight into what the ex-pupils had to say. Of equal interest are the several methods used to access data and which are not reported on here. For details of the full work please contact Heather Thomas at [redacted] or Tel: [redacted]. I would be pleased to share the full findings with individuals or groups.

Heather Thomas MEd (Birmingham), PGC Ed Res., BA Hons. (Open), BEd. (London), Dip App Soc Sci., Cert Ed.

Heather Thomas (Sullivan) was science teacher/co-ordinator and KS3 manager in a special school, where she taught for seventeen years until 2010, having previously taught science in Wolverhampton and Jamaica. This research summarised here has been submitted to Birmingham University in part satisfaction of the requirements for the granting of the degree of Doctor of Education.

APPENDIX 31

Modules attended and related assignments submitted as part of the Birmingham University EdD programme

Research module 1: Identity and Epistemology (4,000 words)

Research module 2: Designing Research (4,000 words)

Research module 3: Using Sources and Producing Analysis (4,000 words not sbmtd.)

Subj. module: Educational Disadvantage and Special Educational Need (4,000 words)

Subject Module: Educational Disability, Social Justice and Education (4,000 words)

Module 5: Thesis Proposal' (13,000 words)

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